

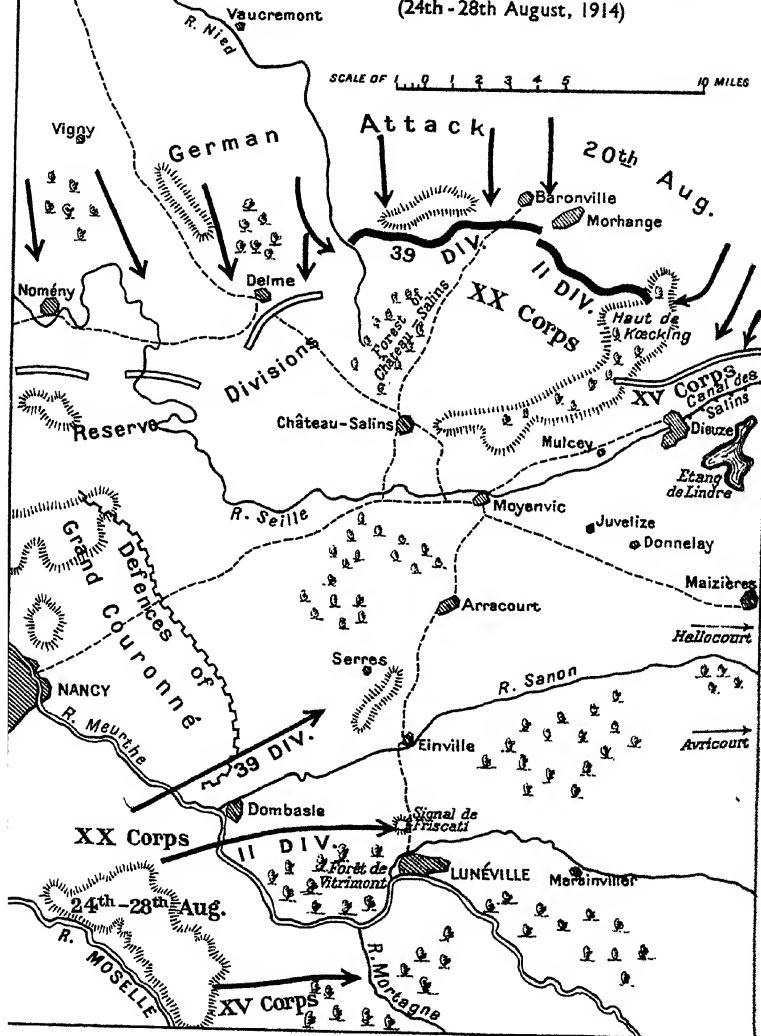
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BATTLES OF MORHANGE

(20th August, 1914)

AND LA MORTAGNE

(24th - 28th August, 1914)

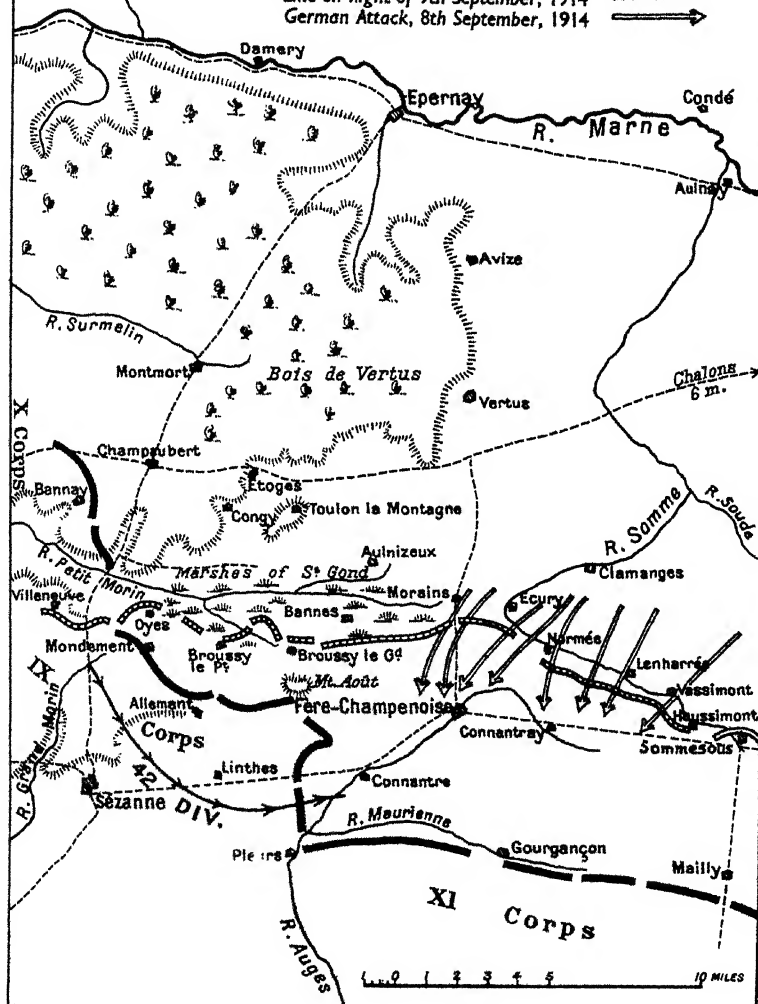
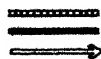


THE NINTH ARMY IN THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE

Line on night of 7th September, 1914

Line on night of 9th September, 1914

German Attack, 8th September, 1914



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MARSHAL FOCH



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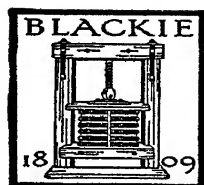
By Sir William Orpen, R.A.

From the painting in the Imperial War Museum, London

MARSHAL FOCH

BY

CYRIL FALLS



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PREFACE

IT is not to be expected that, in a miniature biography such as this, the military operations in which Marshal Foch took part can be described in detail. The impossibility of doing so will be at once apparent if we consider that from the end of March, 1918, the record of those operations amounts to a history of the war on the Western Front.

I take a certain pride, however, that I have contrived, by means of rigid compression and by clinging only to what I hope are the essentials, to give practically a day to day account of his actions from the time of his recall from leave to Nancy in late July, 1914, to the arrival of his forces on the Aisne after the victory of the Marne. My reason for doing so will be obvious. For the rest of the war, as Assistant to the Commander-in-Chief, as Army Group Commander, as Chief of the General Staff, as Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies, Foch was to be a maker of plans, an inspirer, a co-ordinator. The short periods of his command of the XX. Corps and of the Ninth Army have a different interest. Then, and then only, was he in close touch with the fighting troops.

Such detail as my space permits is, therefore, reserved for that period. After the Marne I have given only a general sketch of operations, with special reference to the ideas, the influence, and the activities of the marshal.

I have criticized little. For the most part I have tried

to make the facts speak so clearly for themselves that the reader can form his own opinion. They do appear to me to speak for themselves as regards the years 1914, 1915 and 1916; and what they have to say does not always correspond exactly to the legend surrounding the name of Foch. It is evident, for example, that at Ypres and Arras in the year 1915 he was to some extent, like all the rest, mentally as well as materially enchained. As a tactician he made no contributions to the science of warfare as outstanding as those of Ludendorff and his remarkable team: Kuhl, Lossberg, Geyer and Bauer. On the other hand, in 1918 he showed himself a strategist of a far higher order, and the principles on which he then worked were not only those which he had evolved as a result of his experience in 1915, but also the logical development of those which he had enunciated at the School of War many years earlier. The circumstances of the Great War on the Western Front are such that it is never easy to assess the value of the commander, and it is in all humility that I put forward my view of the rôle of Foch as Generalissimo.

First, the man was a leader. "*Chef, le maréchal Foch l'était au suprême degré,*" General Weygand has written of him. He had painted his own portrait long before he reached high command, when he was a military instructor:

"When the hour comes to take decisions, to demand sacrifices, where shall we find instruments suited to such an enterprise if not among those lofty spirits who are eager for responsibility, impregnated with the will to conquer?"

Strength and authority radiated from him, and he stretched out both hands to grasp, not power for its own

sake, or glory, but responsibility. In a war of masses few personalities were so widely known. Yet the influence of the most vivid personalities in such a war is necessarily somewhat limited, and it was on subordinate commanders above all that his was exercised. In that respect he was unique. Of all the men who undertook that difficult task, the command of armies made up of troops of different races, he was the most successful. His secret may be sought in those imponderable qualities which we call vital force or magnetism; but it is to be found, above all, in the complete and obvious equilibrium of his mind, which to a degree not easily paralleled among commanders remained unaffected by danger or disappointment.

To turn now to the technical side: the battles of 1918 may be looked upon from the point of view of Foch first of all in terms of reserves, his own and the enemy's. In the bad days of that year he was often to be seen standing, pipe in mouth, before the huge map of the Western Front on which were marked day by day the positions of every Allied division, and of those of the Germans so far as they were known. What he was watching was particularly those little blocks which marked the concentration of reserves at railway and road centres. Ludendorff might surprise and defeat him, but never would he catch him without means to reinforce at the point of danger. He never committed his reserves without necessity, and he never failed, while on the defensive, to keep some in his hand.

It will appear from the account of the offensive that on two occasions Foch modified his own immediate plans at the suggestion of the British Commander-in-Chief, Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig. This has been made a matter of reproach. It seems rather proof not

only of his broadmindedness, but of the fact that these plans were built up little by little as Foch saw light through the darkness. Fix, engage, exploit—in circumstances far different from those he had foreseen, he was, in fact, putting into practice the lessons he had taught in time of peace.

This was strikingly different from the German preconceived plan, indeed, from the German tradition, which had another source. The former came from Napoleon to Foch; the latter to Ludendorff, through Schlieffen, from Moltke.

What is the essential characteristic of Ludendorff's offensives? A break-through produced by a surprise blow of terrific violence, followed by the rolling up of one or both of the flanks created by the breach. Foch had, at least since 1915, definitely condemned this strategy. General Weygand, who knew the marshal's ideas so well that their two minds may almost be said to have worked as one, has described to me his views. The actual words deserve to be commemorated, because in their lapidary conciseness they form a contribution to the history of the Great War:—

“The marshal never believed in the possibility of a ‘break-through’ with decisive effect when two armies of equal fighting value were in question. In 1918 it was the break-through that was sought by Ludendorff in March, in April, in May. The marshal, on the contrary, had long decided that when the moment for the offensive came he would *extend the battle to the flanks* as soon as he perceived that it ran the risk of thinning off into a point and blocking itself. Thus, he enlarged his front of attack successively on the 21st to the 23rd August, and later on the 26th to the 28th September.

All this had already been decided in his mind and was capable of being put into practice as circumstances permitted."

The aim of Foch was the attainment of a strategic objective while preventing interference by the hostile reserves. For this purpose he attacked at several points, first of all at short intervals of time, and later, when he had the means, simultaneously. Ludendorff had to change his method and plan because the reserves of Foch continued to confront him; he tried to repair his errors by the Aisne offensive in May, which had the object of exhausting those reserves. He nearly succeeded, but again, as in his first great offensive on the Somme, he let himself be carried away by a tactical success. It was then too late to return to his original scheme. Foch had to make no changes, because his method made allowance for checks. Still he watched reserves, but now mainly the enemy's; for his own were, in accordance with his theories, thrown in as soon as the promise of victory became concrete. Within one month he had exhausted the German reserves to an extent greater than Ludendorff had exhausted those of the Allies in four. We find Ludendorff creating a succession of huge pockets in the Allied front. He did it quickly enough in all conscience, but once he was blocked he brought his attack to an end and gave the Allies time for recovery while he prepared another operation. Foch had, when he opened his counter-offensive, the initial advantage that he could attack the flanks of these pockets. But he never created pockets of his own. His objectives were so well chosen and interconnected in such a way that their attainment brought about the hasty retreat of the enemy between them. In short, the purpose of Foch was neither the

break-through nor the turning of a flank, which had come to be considered the only possible alternatives in an offensive; it was rather the paralysis of the enemy by the seizure of the road and rail junctions which may be likened to the nerve centres in the human frame.

I desire to express my gratitude to General Weygand, who not only received me at his château in Finisterre and answered a long string of questions, but also read my proofs. To Br.-General Sir James Edmonds, the greatest living authority on the war on the Western Front, who read these pages, chapter by chapter, as each was written, I owe an equal debt. Captain Wilfrid Miles, the historian of the Battle of the Somme, read my chapter on the year 1916, and also assisted me with regard to material. Lieut.-General Sir Charles Grant gave me valuable personal information about the British Mission to the headquarters of the Allied Armies. M. Edouard Bienvenüe of Saint-Brieuc helped me with family history. Lieut.-Colonel H. G. de Watteville and Lieut.-Colonel J. S. Yule read my proofs. Invaluable as has been the aid of these kindly helpers, I must make it clear that they have no responsibility for my statements. For good or ill, my treatment of the life of Marshal Foch is my own.

Lastly, I wish to record my obligation to the venerable and gracious lady who, in the midst of her family, received me at Trofeunteuniou; showed me the house and, above all, the marshal's study, which remains as it was when he worked in it; and took me round the estate, which bears his impress so strongly. Not only with regard to this small book but also for an experience which will always remain with me, I have to thank Madame la Maréchale Foch.

CYRIL FALLS.

CONTENTS

CHAP.		Page
I.	THE BACKGROUND - - - -	I
II.	THE MAN - - - -	7
III.	THE DOCTRINE - - - -	21
IV.	PREPARATION - - - -	32
V.	OPPOSING FORCES, OPPOSING PLANS -	36
VI.	FIRST ENCOUNTER - - - -	44
VII.	BACK FROM THE FRONTIER - -	53
VIII.	THE MARNE - - - -	58
IX.	FLANDERS, 1914 - - - -	74
X.	YEAR OF EXPERIMENT - - - -	86
XI.	YEAR OF THE SOMME - - - -	100
XII.	DISREPUTE - - - -	113
XIII.	CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF - -	120
XIV.	GENERALISSIMO - - - -	131
XV.	DEFENSIVE - - - -	137
XVI.	COUNTER-OFFENSIVE - - - -	151
XVII.	VICTORY - - - -	159
XVIII.	PEACE - - - -	168
XIX.	THE END - - - -	177
	PRINTED SOURCES CONSULTED - -	185
	INDEX - - - -	187

LIST OF PLATES

	Facing page
MARSHAL FOCH, BY SIR WILLIAM ORPEN, R.A. <i>Frontispiece</i>	
FERDINAND FOCH AT THE AGE OF EIGHT YEARS	8
LIEUT.-COLONEL FOCH, INSTRUCTOR AT THE SCHOOL OF WAR - - - - -	16
GENERAL FOCH, COMMANDANT OF THE SCHOOL OF WAR - - - - -	16
GENERAL FOCH ENTERING NANCY TO ASSUME COMMAND OF THE XX. CORPS, 22nd AUGUST, 1913 - - - - -	32
DURING THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME, AT BRITISH ADVANCED G.H.Q., BEAUQUESNE - - -	108
AFTER THE AMIENS VICTORY, AT BRITISH FOURTH ARMY H.Q., FLIXECOURT - - - - -	154
MARSHAL FOCH IN THE PEACE MARCH - - -	168
THE MANOR OF TROFEUNTEUNIOU, 1938 - - -	176

Note.—The four pre-war portraits are reproduced by the courtesy of the Librairie Plon, the publishers of the Marshal's Memoirs.

In the group "After the Amiens Victory", it may be of interest to note some names in addition to those printed below the plate. Behind General Débeney is General Weygand; behind Marshal Foch is Lieut.-General Sir H. A. Lawrence, Chief of the General Staff in France; between King George and Sir Douglas Haig are Major-General H. C. Holman, Chief Administrative Staff Officer of the Fourth Army, and (behind him) Lord Stamfordham, in attendance on the King; between Sir Douglas Haig and General Pétain is Major-General R. U. H. Buckland, Chief Engineer of the Fourth Army; behind him (bare-headed) is Major-General C. D. Budworth, Artillery Commander of the Fourth Army; behind General Pétain (also bare-headed) is Major-General A. A. Montgomery, Chief General Staff Officer of the Fourth Army, now Field-Marshal Sir Archibald Montgomery-Massingberd.

SKETCH MAPS

	Page
THE YPRES-YSER BATTLEFIELD - - - -	76
BATTLES OF ARTOIS, SPRING AND AUTUMN, 1915 -	90
BATTLE OF THE SOMME, 1916 - - - -	102

Front End Papers:

BATTLES OF MORHANGE AND LA MORTAGNE,
1914.

THE NINTH ARMY IN THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE,
1914.

Back End Papers:

GERMAN OFFENSIVES, 1918.

ALLIED OFFENSIVES, 1918.

CHAPTER I

THE BACKGROUND

THE career of a great man is his character, his influence, and his deeds. Habits, disposition, family life, friendships and amusements may be relegated to a secondary level of interest, save in so far as they illustrate what he was and what he effected in the moral and physical spheres. When they cease to do so, they lead us into the by-ways of biography, pleasant like most by-ways after the bustle of the main roads, but belonging to the literature of entertainment. This is particularly true of the soldier.

If we look at Ferdinand Foch in this light we find that we can conveniently and appropriately confine his biography within narrow limits. He marches along a straight, high-fenced road. The milestones on it are education—preparation for leadership in war—teaching—leadership in war. This is not the case with all soldiers of his period. His French contemporary Lyautey, for example, had a life of multifeatured, multicoloured incident, so that his record is as exciting and as entrancing as that of any hero of romance; his British contemporary, Kitchener, lacked the *panache* of Lyautey, but his exploits were as varied and his achievements were more massive. Younger French leaders who rose to distinction in the Great War, such as Mangin, Gouraud, Henrys, had borne upon the shoulders of lieutenant-colonels responsibility for the safety of districts as large as half a dozen departments of France. Meanwhile,

Foch had moved from garrison to garrison at home, had learnt, had taught, and had reflected.

For most soldiers this is a deadening life, and to live it for a term of well-nigh forty-five years would for them rob Purgatory of its fears. All military training has in it an artificial element because its effects are largely a matter of guesswork. Real war is always, as *Punch* once reminded us, distinguished from the mimic war of manœuvres or exercises by the presence of the enemy and the absence of the general. Men prepare themselves to defend their country, seldom completely assured that the lessons they are taught and pass on to their subordinates will prove as sound in practice as in theory. Sometimes—and this is a very hard fate for the thoughtful among them—they find themselves in the grip of military doctrine which they distrust. Then, too, the routine immures and shackles them. The bugle opens, punctuates, and ends the day, which has resembled yesterday and is a foretaste of to-morrow. The eye tends to fix itself on detail, which may change as the years pass, but does so very slowly, almost imperceptibly. The littlenesses of personal incompatibilities and conflicts swell to unnatural size.

Some men grow peevish in such circumstances. On some their effect is a numbing of the intellect, an arrest of the development of the mind. They move within the close orbit of their immediate duties and see naught beyond. Many, especially in our own army, seek an outlet in sport, and a magnificent outlet it is, often of great value in the formation of a leader; but it may also create a set of false values, and let it come to be accepted that the best sportsman is also the best soldier. Travel, foreign missions, posts such as that of military attaché, sharpen the brains and open the eyes of others. Some,

but singularly few nowadays in the more civilized nations, plunge into dissipation.

"Their idleness," said David Hume, "together with the large societies which they form in camps or garrisons inclines them to pleasure and gallantry: by their frequent change of company, they acquire good breeding and an openness of behaviour: being employed only against a public and an open enemy, they become candid, honest and undesigning: and as they use more the labour of the body than that of the mind, they are commonly thoughtless and ignorant."

This is by no means so typical a martial portrait in our days as it was in Hume's, but it is at least a frame in which a good many martial portraits would not look out of place.

The favourite outlet of the enterprising and ambitious officer is, however, active service, which—since, fortunately for civilization, European wars are by no means continuous—generally means Asiatic or African service, "small wars". In our professional army the more important of such campaigns come the way of a large number in the ordinary course of military duty; but even with us the lesser have to be angled for, and remarkable is the skill which many a distinguished general officer has shown in their pursuit. In an army such as that of France before 1914, the aspirant for such service had an exceptionally difficult path, unless he entered some formation such as the Algerian Tirailleurs or the Foreign Legion. Yet, as has been stated, many of the best French officers did a great deal of interesting and profitable bush-whacking in the earlier phases of their careers.

It was well that this should have been so. The habit of decision in emergency is not one so easily acquired,

but that all opportunities for acquiring it should be gladly seized. Certainly none of the experience gathered by a Gouraud or a Mangin in Algeria or Morocco was without value. Yet Colonial warfare and European are widely different, and the lessons of the former, too literally translated into the language of the latter, have often proved harmful. In 1914, for instance, the German Army had virtually no colonial education, yet it was if anything a more efficient weapon than the French. It is salutary for an army that some soldiers, and these among the strongest minded and most influential, should deliberately eschew the excitements, the decorations, and the promotion of the *bled*, the *veldt*, or the bush. They run their own risks, even if their zeal and intelligence place them beyond reach of those already mentioned. Chief among them is that of creating a purely theoretical conception of warfare, building a superstructure of doctrine upon foundations of dogma which are less substantial, permanent, and universal than they suppose. But, once more, it is beneficial that certain minds should accept these risks, should disengage themselves from outside interests and concentrate upon the soldier's vital task in peace: preparation for defending his country and its interests from the most dangerous and direct forms of hostile attack.

Such was the path of Foch, just as it was of Hindenburg and Ludendorff, his chief opponents, who like him never saw a colonial campaign, and like him were Staff College instructors. Foch followed it gladly, though he took it as it came; for personal ambition, except for his views, formed a strikingly small element in his constitution. (In 1903 he wrote to an acquaintance, from Laon, where he was with an artillery regiment, a lieutenant-colonel in semi-disgrace, aged fifty-two:

"I very seldom go to Paris, asking nothing of anybody, waiting tranquilly for them to move me on from here.") He lived the life of French garrisons, more circumscribed and with fewer diversions than our own, broken by periods of employment as a military instructor and as a staff officer at the Ministry of War. The more trivial dangers of such an existence never touched him. The serious danger, which existed only for the superior mind—the doctrinal danger, as we may call it—is another matter. How far that affected Foch is a question which will constantly arise in the course of the following pages. It was decreed by fate or chance, allied with his own abilities, that he should exercise an influence upon two generations of French officers hardly to be paralleled in times of peace. Then came war. Within two months he was to find himself in command of something like a fourth of those officers still remaining. Within little more than three and a half years he was to have them all under his orders and to be in supreme command of allied armies numbered by millions.

So, if the road he trod was straight and without branches, it led to the summit of interest. If we confine our study almost wholly to his character, his doctrine and his deeds in warfare, that should not deprive it of profit. It will include none of the brilliant empire-building of a Galliéri or a Lyautey; none of the thrilling adventures, from Fashoda to Marrakech, of a Mangin; none even of the "victories without a morrow", which cannot be disguised or explained away, of an Allenby or a Franchet d'Espérey in the Great War itself. Nevertheless, if it fails to appeal, the fault will lie in the expositor, not in the subject. The theme of a man, his mind and his predominant part in one of the most momentous events of history ought not to be lacking in significance.

At least it can be promised that the work will be undertaken without prejudice or preconception, without the adulation, natural but unreasoned, with which he was overwhelmed, and also without the disparagement and denigration to which he has occasionally been subjected. The evidence is all available. The task is but to draw upon it fairly and honestly, not picking out the fruit that goes best in the author's favourite pie.

CHAPTER II

THE MAN

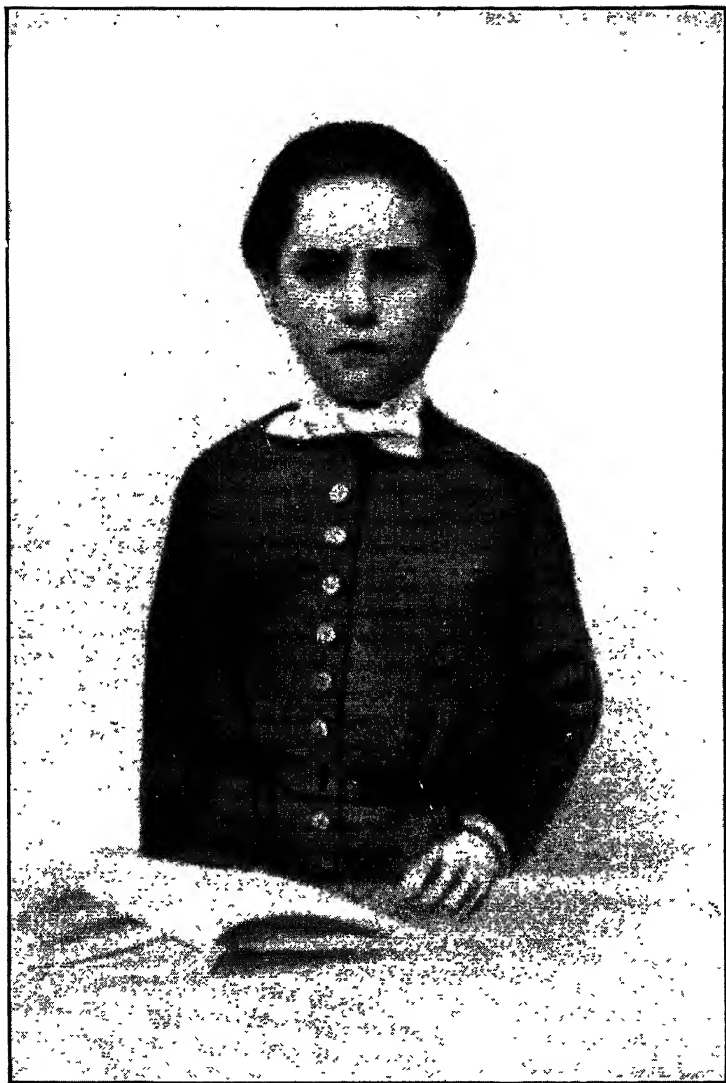
FORGETFUL of the differences between, say, the men of Devon and the men of Sussex in our own country, we are inclined to draw a picture of the "Southerner" in France and apply it to all who dwell south of a certain latitude. The model for this portrait is generally the Provençal, because we know him best. He is plump, light-hearted, mercurial and somewhat unstable, hot-tempered, and irreligious. How far this is true of the Provençal himself one need not now inquire, but it is certainly not true of the folk of the Pyrenean slopes farther west, in the southern part of the old province of Gascony and in that of Béarn. Quick in temper they may be, but they are altogether harder and more athletic than the men of Provence; they have a very grim pertinacity; and the Church has a strong hold upon a large proportion of them.

Of this race came Ferdinand Foch. He was born at Tarbes, in the Department of the Hautes-Pyrénées, on 2nd October, 1851. The family, however, came from Valentine, almost a suburb of Saint-Gaudens, a little farther east. There is, or was, a tradition that its origin was Alsatian, but this can almost certainly be disregarded. It seems to have no better foundation than that the name has a Rhenish air, whereas it is in fact local. Latin *focus*, dialect *fioch*; such is the probable derivation. One would be positive of it did it not chance that the

meaning of these words is "fire", which is almost too good to be true.

The family of Foch was sprung neither from the southern aristocracy which produced the Marquis de Curières de Castelnau from a tree laden with eminent soldiers, nor from the southern people which produced Joseph-Cézaire Joffre. It was rather a stock of modest, diligent industrialists. Generation after generation was "in wool". It provided several first consuls of Valentine, and, a time coming when there was room for one First Consul only, Dominique Foch became mayor of that commune. In 1803 a son was born to him, whom in his enthusiasm he named Bertrand-Napoléon. There had been many priests among the younger sons of this family, as was often the case in that walk of life, but as yet no soldiers known to history. Dominique's wife, whose maiden name was Ducuing, had, however, military connexions, and his son Bertrand-Napoléon married Marie-Sophie-Jacqueline Dupré, daughter of a captain in the Grand Army. The old man looked upon his grandson; for their lives overlapped by a few months.

Bertrand-Napoléon Foch cut loose from the family tradition. He became a solicitor and later passed into the "Administration"—we call it the Civil Service. His career involved transfer from post to post, and as he desired to keep his boys under his own roof, they frequently changed their day-schools. There was, however, the background of the little family dwelling at Valentine, where Ferdinand spent a proportion of his holidays, often tramping the hillsides with gun and dog, and fishing the small streams. All his life he took pleasure in shooting over dogs. He was a remarkably good shot, though from the left shoulder owing to a weakness in his right eye. Of equestrian sport, which generally plays



FERDINAND FOCH AT THE AGE OF EIGHT YEARS

a part in the biographies of our own soldiers when they are equally good horsemen, we hear little in his case. In the French pre-war Army participation in it was largely confined to cavalymen of considerable means: one of the few distinguished gunners who had the reputation of being a good steeplechase rider was the future General Nivelle. Foch, however, occasionally followed hounds at Pau and later at Fontainebleau.

Four children were born of the late marriage of Bertrand-Napoléon Foch. The eldest was a daughter; the second became a lawyer; the third was Ferdinand; the fourth became a priest.

The boy's education began at the lycée of his birth-place, Tarbes, and was continued at that of Rodez, at the little seminary of Polignan, and at the Jesuit College of Saint-Michel at Saint-Etienne, to which he went in 1867. Here among his schoolfellows was his friend and collaborator of the Great War, the future Marshal Fayolle. Though he was already destined for the Ecole Polytechnique, his father did not allow him at this stage to specialize in mathematics, for which he showed aptitude. (His teacher at Rodez had marked his report: "*Esprit géométrique, ayant l'étoffe d'un polytechnicien*," which recalls the verdict on another youth who was to become the most famous of all artillerymen.) He therefore took the *baccalauréat-ès-lettres* and afterwards agreed that his father had done well in giving him an all-round education. In after life he was a solid if not a wide reader, whose favourite classics, Corneille, Racine, La Bruyère and Shakespeare (in translation), jostled on his shelves the works connected with his profession, Clausewitz, Jomini, von der Goltz, Bernhardi, Hoenig and Bonnal. The only book which we hear of as attracting him at this period was, significantly, the famous history

of Thiers. Of this there was a copy at Valentine, a legacy of old Captain Dupré, which the child had read and re-read before he reached his teens.

Another institution of those excellent pedagogues, the Jesuits, that of Saint-Clément at Metz, had a high reputation for preparing candidates for the Polytechnic, as well as for Saint-Cyr and the School of Forestry. Students came to it from far, especially to sit at the feet of Father Saussié, the Professor of Mathematics; but few can have come from so far as Ferdinand Foch when he arrived in 1869. For the first time he lived as a boarder.

He was now an attractive young man, with regular features, in body strong though not tall, in temperament shy but friendly, impulsive but reserved. He had, in all probability, more markedly than later the trace of southern accent—rather intonation than accent—which remained with him to the last. He won the prize for good conduct awarded annually by the votes of the students themselves.

Then came the Franco-Prussian War. Young Foch saw the Emperor arrive, lying back in his open carriage, obviously in pain, worn-out, and dispirited. With miserable eyes the lad noted the confusion, omen of defeat, of which indeed the news soon came in. He sat for his examinations in early August, 1870, with the open windows rattling to the thunder of distant guns.

The school did not reassemble after the summer holidays, and Foch enlisted in the 4th Infantry Regiment "for the duration", a phrase become familiar to all who fought in a later war. He saw no active service, had a miserable time in that severe winter, and returned to Metz, disgusted with his fortune, in March, 1871. The presence of German troops in part of the school

buildings did nothing to raise his spirits. A little later came the sad news that Lorraine had been ceded to Germany and was no longer French territory.

In the summer he went to Nancy to sit for the entrance examination to the Polytechnic. There, too, the Germans were in occupation, though in this case only temporarily, and General von Manteuffel was installed in the old Palais du Gouvernement. The war had perhaps changed the destiny of Ferdinand Foch. The Ecole Polytechnique is in part the equivalent of the British Royal Military Academy, with military discipline, but in addition to being the doorway to the artillery and army engineers it leads also to official civil engineering. His father had been inclined to favour the civil side, but the war changed that. Without ever being a fanatical exponent of revenge, the son now felt that the struggle would one day be renewed and desired to prepare himself for it. What he had seen at Metz, at Nancy and on the railways was branded upon his mind, a picture sombre in tint but clear in every detail; it was to remain with him all his life.

He passed in without any particular distinction, seventy-sixth, about half-way down the list. (Joffre, an able mathematician and a remarkably good examinee, had been fourteenth out of 132 at an exceptionally early age.) This was only, as subsequent examinations were to prove, because Foch was a slow starter.

Sad reminders of French misfortune and of civil strife following upon military disaster greeted him when, on 1st November, he arrived in Paris and repaired to the famous building in the rue Descartes. Communards had been shot in the courtyard, and there were bullet marks on the walls. The work of refashioning the army had already begun. There was a call for cadets

to pass into the Artillery School at Fontainebleau after a shortened course, to do a course of eighteen months there, and to reach their regiments as officers in September, 1874. He volunteered and, passing out third, was given the choice of a regiment. He chose the 24th, at Tarbes.

It was pleasant to be back at home, but the atmosphere was one of hard work and high endeavour. The young officers of that generation, as well as their superiors and their instructors, felt that there was much to be done, and that there might not be much time in which to do it. In 1875 Bismarck threatened to renew the war.

Foch next went for a course at the Cavalry School of Saumur, passing out fourth, which of itself sufficed to prove that he was an exceptionally good horseman. In after life he looked back with gratitude to the instruction he had received at both Fontainebleau and Saumur. In 1878 he was promoted captain, at the age of twenty-six, and posted to a battery in the 10th Artillery Regiment at Rennes, where he was required to give instruction both in cavalry tactics and in equitation.

In Brittany he met and married in 1883 Mademoiselle Julie Bienvenüe of Saint-Brieuc, an only child sprung from a legal family long and honourably known in those parts. Foch had been to a large extent cut off from earlier surroundings when his father died in 1880. Henceforth he was at least half Breton, and the old Duchy was his second fatherland. He became deeply attached to *la Bretagne bretonnante*, with its piety, its simplicity, and the wild beauty of its countryside. The tie was strengthened when in 1895 he and Madame Foch bought the manor and small estate of Trofeunteuniou, near Morlaix, in sea-girt Finisterre, the westernmost department of France. The strictly correct but

seldom used spelling of the name is Traonfeunteunniou, which means "source of the fountains". This charming house, set in lovely country, was his background for the rest of his life. He spent nearly all his leave there. He was a garden-lover and an even warmer lover of trees, with a considerable knowledge of forestry. Apart from a certain number of fine old trees which he preserved, all the timber now on the estate is of his planting. Three children were born to him, two girls who married soldiers named Fournier and Bécourt, and a boy: all seven persons forming a united and devoted family.

While he was at Rennes Foch began to work for the Ecole de Guerre, then not long founded. He reached it in 1885, after a short period of service in the Section Technique of the Artillery at the Ministry of War. The Ecole de Guerre, as its name implies, claims to be something more than our Staff College, but like it is the avenue to the General Staff and to high command. Foch made his mark there. In particular, he attracted the attention of an able instructor, Commandant Millet, who twenty years later, when in command of an army corps, took him as his Chief of the Staff. The outstanding conclusion which Millet had drawn from the war of 1870 was the tactical lesson that fire-power dominated the battlefield, so that no troops in contact with the enemy could hope to advance without obtaining superiority of fire. Foch himself, when he became an instructor, devoted himself largely to strategical studies, but as for him the aim of strategy was to bring on a battle he always looked upon strategy as the servant of tactics, and constantly drove home the lesson regarding fire-power learnt at the feet of Millet. This must not be forgotten. It was here that his theories differed from the extravagant ones which succeeded them in the French

Army, the doctrine that the offensive had some sort of magic virtue enabling it to dispense with fire support. Fire preparation—assault—exploitation of advantage gained: it was thus that Millet and Foch after him envisaged the stages of the modern battle.

The next appointment was to the Staff of the XVI. Corps at Montpellier. In February, 1891, Foch was promoted to the rank of *chef d'escadrons*, or major. He had been over twelve years a captain, but to reach his present rank soon after his thirty-ninth birthday was pretty good progress. Promotion was to be much slower for some time to come. He was then summoned to Paris to the 3rd (Operations) Bureau at the Ministry of War, where a talented soldier, General de Miribel, was Chief of the General Staff. Next he had a spell, for which his good horsemanship and his successful course at the Cavalry School qualified him, with horse artillery at Vincennes. In 1894 came another turn of duty on the General Staff, and then, in October, 1895, he mounted one of the most important stepping-stones of his career. He was appointed assistant professor of military history, strategy and applied tactics at the Ecole de Guerre.

He was there six years, in the midst of which period, in 1898, he reached the rank of lieutenant-colonel and rose to the chief professorship, *la grande chaire*. Six "promotions", or classes of picked officers, passed through his hands. We need not name any of them here, but it is of interest to note, in view of what followed, that they did not include Loyzeau de Grandmaison, who passed out the year before the arrival of Foch. It is more important to glance at the names of some who were instructors at one time or another, and who rose to very high rank in the Great War. Among them are numbered

Pétain, Marshal and Commander-in-Chief; Fayolle, Marshal and Army Group Commander; Maistre, Army Group Commander; Débeney, "Major-Général", or Chief of the General Staff of the French Armies, and Army Commander; de Maud'huy, Army Commander. None of these eminent men had as much influence as Foch. We shall have more to say presently of his lectures; let us for the moment strive to catch a glimpse of the lecturer.

Foch at about the age of forty-five was a handsome man, with the type of good looks which are made vital by character and personality. There was nothing wooden in his military elegance, but it was intensely military. One who then sat at his feet thus recorded many years later his impression of his instructor:

"He was spare and distinguished-looking. He wore with some dash the contemporary artillery jacket, which a deplorable mania for uniformity has since abolished. The first impression which he gave was one of quiet strength and intellectual honesty. His forehead was that of a thinker; his nose was straight and clean-cut; and his grey-blue eyes looked straight into the hearts of his audience. He spoke as one having authority, in a grave and somewhat harsh and monotonous voice, weighing his words and often using long sentences in order to make clear every part of his close argument."

He was not a finished speaker; a more hostile witness speaks of *éloquence heurtée, brutale, incorrecte, intermittente*. His voice was always the least attractive element in his personality. His employment of words, if effective, was sometimes odd, and on occasion he used definitely bad French. Yet he could create vibrant phrases. That was

a combination in which he had a famous exemplar in French military annals.

With Foch the vibrant phrases were reserved for Orders of the Day; they seldom appeared in his lectures or later on in his directives—and the latter, if he rarely wrote them, were always carefully edited by his hand. To the non-military reader the lectures are perhaps somewhat heavy. To the mind trained to military thought they are, however, fascinating. Apart from the subject, the power and personality of the speaker seized and held the attention. No one emerged from his courses without bearing away the impression that he had been listening to a remarkable man.

At this time and until the war the character of Foch appeared so close to the soldier's ideal that a biographer may be suspected of partiality when he is in fact but faithfully recording. Brusque and decisive, he was at the same time just, even-tempered, affable, approachable and kindly. An optimist by nature, he faced the present as well as the future with a smile. Increasing age and the coming of war were to bring a certain change. Subordinates who observed the comfort in which their superiors lived during those years did not always appreciate the strain to which they were subjected, but they had unfortunately to note that pre-war tempers often deteriorated. The strain upon an army group commander and still more upon the commander-in-chief of the Allied Armies was very severe. Mr. Winston Churchill has remarked that at Jutland Jellicoe was the only man in the world who could have lost the war in the course of an afternoon. Well, there were times in 1918 when Foch could very effectively have lost it within a week.

The strain showed. The essential qualities remained, but they were sometimes hidden by pettishness, gusts



LIEUT.-COLONEL FOCH, INSTRUCTOR
AT THE SCHOOL OF WAR



GENERAL FOCH, COMMANDANT OF
THE SCHOOL OF WAR

of temper, even temporary injustice. He demanded that his reasoning, however incompletely expressed, should be understood on the spot, and was angered if it was not. And, as General Desticker, who served him so long and so well, has noted, he was often angered just because he could not express himself as quickly as he desired, and then his language was very forcible. Yet he was at no time sour or rancorous, and the smiling optimism was seldom far away. When the war was over the old kindliness once more held almost undisputed sway. It was not the softening of age so much as a return to his old self, or rather the stripping of his old self of that protection against strain and adversity, like the callosity on a labourer's hands, which had grown to meet an emergency. One has observed the same process in others who held high command in the Great War.

His piety was simple, sincere, and without parade. He could no more easily have cut himself off from the offices of the Church at a time when to have done so would have promoted his career than he could have ceased to breathe. It was part of his life. But in an age when clerical and anti-clerical were at each other's throats no trace of politics ever entered into the religion of Foch.

Unfortunately for him, it was also an age when the names of officers who attended Mass were carefully noted in a secret dossier of "unreliable" Republicans. He was sent away from the School of War to Laon, and there set in a distinct lag in his promotion. He was lieutenant-colonel in the 29th Artillery Regiment till 1903, and in that year, as full colonel, took over command of the 35th at Vannes, near his home at Trofeunteuniou. It was while he was here that his two books of lectures at the Ecole de Guerre were published,

Des principes de la Guerre in 1903 and *De la conduite de la Guerre* next year. In 1905 he became Chief of the Staff to General Millet in the V. Corps at Orleans, and in 1907, with the rank of brigadier-general, was appointed to the General Staff in Paris.

At the beginning of 1908 he was summoned to meet the President of the Council, Georges Clemenceau. The Directorship of the Ecole de Guerre was vacant, and Foch had heard mention of his name in connexion with it. He knew, too, that Millet was working to obtain it for him; but he was not a candidate and he was astonished when the Premier offered him the post. The great anti-clericalist began with some sneers at his Catholic connexions. Foch answered firmly and did not slur the fact that his brother was a Jesuit priest. Clemenceau, with one of his typically well-salted expressions, bade him go ahead with the job.

So, as he put it, after being thrown out of the window he came in by the front door. To six years of professorship succeeded four years of directorship. Soldiers of another generation, roughly ten years younger, now came under his influence. True, he no longer occupied a chair; his task was supervision, of war games as well as lectures. Yet none passed through the school without learning a good deal about the personality and ideas of the director, or, what is more, without the director learning a good deal about him. The long ride, stirrup to stirrup, to which each was summoned in turn, was in anticipation a formidable ordeal, though it passed pleasantly enough. When it was over another set of characteristics was added to a retentive memory. He also instituted a third-year course for the study of higher strategy by selected officers. This was found in practice to keep such officers too long away from their regiments,

and was quickly replaced by what was known as the *Centre des Hautes Etudes*, a special course for lieutenant-colonels. Among these was a promising cavalryman of Belgian extraction named Maxime Weygand, who had not acquired the *brevet* of the Ecole de Guerre. That was, however, after Foch had passed on, without meeting his future chief of the staff.

As commandant of the School of War Foch came in contact with important personages in several foreign armies, including his "opposite number", Br.-General Henry Wilson, commandant of the Staff College at Camberley. It has been alleged that as a result of their conversations Great Britain was tied down to the despatch of an expeditionary force to France; but this is a gross exaggeration. Were it true, both their countries would be further indebted to them; for without our expeditionary force France would have been vanquished. Foch also received the commandant of the Nicolas Academy, and as a result was invited to attend the Russian manoeuvres of 1910. The Emperor showed him particular favour and kept him close to his person throughout the period. Foch could not avoid misgiving when he reflected that the whole structure of France's gigantic ally depended upon this one man. If the strain of a great war were to be added to the difficulties inherent in the organization of power, what would be the effects on a people never permitted to take part in the conduct of affairs? The Emperor himself was, fortunately, the soul of honour and loyalty. Yet the sombre anxiety with which he regarded the future communicated itself to his guest.

Time was passing and age was creeping on. When in 1911, the year of the Agadir crisis, Foch was promoted to the rank of *général de division* and took com-

mand of the 14th Division at Chaumont, he had almost reached his sixtieth birthday. Joffre, who had got command of an army corps at fifty-six, had outdistanced him by some six years.

CHAPTER III

THE DOCTRINE

WHEN he stood up to deliver his first lecture, Foch reminded his hearers that the words "School of War" were inscribed upon the building which sheltered them. Could these words "school" and "war" be associated? Was it possible to conceive preparation for one activity: war, exercised amidst danger, amidst the unexpected, amidst violence, amidst brutality, amidst terror, by another activity: study, which lived only in calm, in method, in reflection, in reason? Could war be taught?

The Ecole de Guerre, he remarked, was established in 1876, but it had not sufficed to inscribe the title on the walls in order to create it. There had been, he considered, no practical teaching till the course of 1882-1883. The failure of the former instruction had been psychological. The instructors had recognized that there were two sets of factors which influenced the result of a campaign, two sets of variables, as he called them in his mathematical fashion: material and moral. They had, however, separated the two and neglected the second set as incapable of exact study. In practice they had assumed them to be equal on either side. Yet, in the words of Jomini, war, "far from being an exact science, is a terrifying and passionate drama".

Then Foch answered his own question. The reality of a future battle was, he said, something which one did not study. On the battlefield one did what one *could* to

apply what one *knew*. To be able to do a little, it was necessary to know much and to know it well. If there were not a science of war, there was a theory founded upon history, and it could be taught. Learning harmony would not make a composer, but a serious musical composition could not be created without a knowledge of harmony.

He enumerated four principles: economy of force; liberty of action; liberty of disposition of force; and *sûreté*, which we may, though rather inadequately, translate as "protection". These he proposed to illustrate by a series of examples. (Incidentally, it is not easy to differentiate between the second and third, and he scarcely attempted to do so.) *Sûreté* was his favourite word, which recurs in his lectures much more frequently than the word "offensive", though the latter is always associated with his name and sometimes as a matter of reproach. The army must be protected by advanced, flank and rear guards, by outposts, by reconnaissance, by a system of intelligence, perhaps in some cases, as he showed in one of his most remarkable lectures, by space. No plan is practicable, no manœuvre is safe, without protection. That was for him really the first principle of war.

If *sûreté* was his favourite word, he had also a favourite phrase, borrowed from the Prussian soldier, assistant of Moltke and Minister of War, Verdy du Vernois, who uttered it upon the battlefield of Nachod. "*De quoi s'agit-il?*" "What's it all about?" or, "What's the gist of the affair?" Throw aside history and principles in the hour of emergency, consider the situation, and act. Yes, but to act correctly you must have reflected and trained yourself. Throw aside history and principles, indeed, but they will not desert you. They are still at

hand when you isolate your problem. This isolation of the problem was for him almost another principle of war. "I do not know," he used to say, years later, to General Weygand, if the latter seemed to be forgetting it, "I do not know whether you are intelligent enough to answer two questions at once. I'm not."

Next we find him on more debatable ground. The only army which he proposed to study was the national mass-army; the only campaigns, those of nation against nation. There was no profit to be derived from the study of older wars, because armies were becoming more and more national, masses ever greater.

Foch foresaw the possibility of a great war of nations, and knew that if it came about the men he was addressing would take a leading part in it. He wanted them to be prepared for the conditions they would meet. Yet these conditions were changing even while he spoke, to assume a form which was to take him by surprise. It is scarcely accurate to assert that no useful lessons can be drawn from the campaigns of Marlborough and Turenne; indeed, the very principles which Foch enunciates can be illustrated from them. Setting that aside, it must be allowed that his historical lectures devoted to the methods of Napoleon and Moltke, especially the latter, are extremely illuminating.

Both these soldiers, it need scarcely be said, were imbued with the doctrine of the offensive, and Foch held it no less strongly than they. Manœuvre to gain a strategic advantage was, he argued, of small avail unless it were followed by battle; otherwise, all was to do again at some later date. Tactical success was the only form that counted in the long run. He probably over-emphasized this reasoning, but the doctrine is sound. The theorist is too apt to be tempted into speculations

about waging war on the cheap. To such a one there appears great attraction in the statement of Saxe that a good general may go through a campaign without fighting a battle, or in the sparring of earlier soldiers like the great Spaniards of the sixteenth century. In the day of Saxe, when armies were victualled from depots in walled towns, or in the day of Gonsalvo of Cordova, facing mercenary armies which dissolved if he kept his own long enough in being, there might be something in such a policy, though Saxe himself never shirked the ordeal of battle. To-day, with national armies amply equipped with transport on regular lines of communication, it will not bring about a decision. Every commander must defeat the opposing forces if he would impose his will upon them and thus impose his nation's will upon theirs.

War is indeed, as the Swiss Jomini called it, "a terrifying and passionate drama"; "hell", as the American Sherman put it more briefly. Avoid it, except in the last resort; put up with humiliation, even, rather than have recourse to it—unless it seems that yielding may invite unprovoked attack—but do not believe that in a national war it is feasible to fight with one hand only or to win without fighting. The combatant who does so will deliver himself over to the mercies of a determined and hard-hitting aggressor.

The military student will not need to be told that in the phrase "economy of force", "economy" is used in a sense wider than that of saving or sparing; it comprises also the older sense of management. The commander must avoid all needless expenditure in order to have the greatest possible resources at the vital point. This principle of neglecting the secondary objectives Foch illustrates by the opening phases of Bonaparte's First

Italian Campaign. The French have a vivid phrase to describe great activity—*se multiplier*, to multiply oneself. It perfectly fits the performances of Bonaparte in 1796, when he constantly covered himself and fixed the enemy by means of strong advanced guards, making of his main body the equivalent of two armies which struck at Piedmontese and Austrians in turn.

Liberty of action is also achieved by the employment of the advanced guard. Here, Foch advances the apparent paradox that the subordinate commander most requires liberty of action—to obey. He quotes with approval the dictum of Field-Marshal von der Goltz, whom he considers Moltke's best pupil: "Initiative is the manifestation of personal will seconded by judgment and working in the direction of the plans of the higher command." He illustrates his point by remorselessly exposing the conduct of General de Failly, commanding the French V. Corps in August, 1870. In brief, the V. Corps, with two divisions about Sarreguemines and one at Bitche, was required to reinforce MacMahon on the high ground above Woerth, where he was awaiting attack by the German Crown Prince in greatly superior numbers. By waiting to rest his troops, by hesitating on account of imaginary dangers, by slow and clumsy protective tactics, de Failly delayed his arrival until the battle had been lost.

He failed for two reasons, says Foch. In the first place, he did not preserve the freedom of action which would have allowed him to use his own initiative, to obey. In the second place, he did not understand how to obtain security from surprise without dispersing his forces to watch every possible avenue of approach. Foch then goes through, step by step with the map, the course of action which might have been followed

by the V. Corps commander—using his initiative to the full yet keeping within the spirit of his instructions from MacMahon—and which would have brought his three divisions on to the battlefield in the course of the vital morning.

But what if he had, in fact, been attacked on the march? Foch turns, in order to illustrate ideal protective arrangements, to a later stage of the Franco-Prussian War, when Manteuffel, heading east to cut off Bourbaki in his march on Belfort, was compelled to move across the front of the French Army of the Vosges, under the command of Garibaldi, at Dijon. Manteuffel was an excellent soldier. His object was to catch and defeat Bourbaki, but he had to cover his flank. Parsimoniously, he doled out to General von Kettler a single brigade and some artillery, and bid him do the job. He knew his man. Kettler did the job with extraordinary boldness, seeing that he was outnumbered by the Army of the Vosges to the extent of ten to one. He even suffered a beating at one point, celebrated by loud blasts on the Garibaldian trumpet. But he contained the Army of the Vosges, enabled the German columns to move unmolested across its front, and thus left Manteuffel free to pursue his operations against Bourbaki. It is true that the French troops were not first-class and that Garibaldi, overrated in his prime, was now a commander out of *opéra bouffe*. Against better troops and an enterprising leader Kettler would have had to give ground and Manteuffel would have had to reinforce him; but that would not have ruined their scheme.

This is an example of the use of the flank guard. For that of the advanced guard Foch turns to another of the lieutenants of Moltke, but this time to the Austro-Prussian War of 1866. The incident described is rela-

tively small in scope but in importance of the highest: the Action of Nachod.

The Prussians were invading Bohemia from Silesia and Saxony, three armies converging through a series of passes. The Austrians were awaiting them in a central position. Their situation would have delighted Napoleon, but the Austrian commander, Benedek, was no Napoleon. However, it is not with him that we are concerned, but with the clash between one of the Prussian advanced guards, that of the V. Corps under Steinmetz, and the troops of the Austrian VI. Corps which opposed it. Here Foch criticizes both sides, the rash and victorious Prussians as well as the lethargic and defeated Austrians, though he is full of praise for the energy of the former. He then deals with the problems of both sides and suggests how Steinmetz might have avoided giving away his position and intentions prematurely. Note that here, just as in the case of the march from Sarreguemines to the battlefield of Woerth, Foch is not demanding unnatural prescience or a decision amid the din of battle, which is all too easy for the critic in the arm-chair. Battle has not been joined, and the situation is simple to the commander who has trained himself to think, and who has a staff capable of measuring the movements of troops in time and space. (It is not always remembered that Foch was a highly accomplished staff officer, with great technical skill in working out those movements of troops by a number of roads which depend for success upon careful mathematical computations.)

No commander was ever better equipped in this respect than Field-Marshal von Moltke. The gem of the second volume, *De la conduite de la Guerre*, is an analysis of how Moltke faced the problem of mobilization. The

German plan in 1870 was governed by the fact that Germany had a true conscript army, small in effectives prior to mobilization, whereas the French Army of that period was largely professional, and would have substantial superiority of numbers at the outset. Moltke had to wait for his reserves; the French did not need to.

Moltke covered his mobilization by space rather than by troops. He had the frontier watched by small detachments, incapable of making a stand. When news reached him by way of Berne that the French were indeed concentrating the bulk of their available forces on their side of the frontier, about Metz and Strasbourg, he ordered the line of concentration and the detraining stations to be drawn back to the Rhine. Again, it was protection by space. As a fact, his fears were groundless. The French were too disorganized and in too great difficulties with their transport to move. Valuable time was lost by the Germans, though some of it was recovered by admirable railway staff-work, the detraining points being moved forward as the armies advanced. Despite all his caution, Moltke ran grave risks.

The fault, says Foch, lay in lack of real *sûreté*, in the absence of a strong fighting advanced guard which would have compelled the French to disclose their intentions. Here and elsewhere Foch criticizes Moltke severely, comparing him, greatly to his disadvantage, with Napoleon. He returns to the charge with even more damaging effect when he deals with the Battle of Mars-la-Tour. Following the French in their retirement after the indecisive action of Borny, east of Metz, Moltke decided that the reasonable course for the enemy to take after the defeat he had suffered at Woerth was to withdraw his Army of the Rhine behind the Meuse at once, so as to put it in a position to join hands with

the other French forces. The best means to prevent this, he thought, was to head the Army of the Rhine off in a northerly direction and seize the Meuse crossings. For this purpose the German Second Army was thrown across the Moselle on a wide front and pushed forward in haste, much dispersed. There was no strategic advanced guard, and the cavalry reconnaissance was bad.

But the French had not taken the reasonable course. The whole Army of the Rhine was, in fact, massed west of Metz. Into this wasps' nest there ran a single German corps, the III., under General von Alvensleben, on 16th August. Had the French been more enterprising, it would have been destroyed, and the X. Corps, which marched to the sound of the guns and was in action before nightfall, might well have shared his fate. It was saved, after a very unpleasant day, by the bad leadership of Bazaine, the pluck of Alvensleben, and, when he had galloped to the battlefield, the initiative of the army commander, Prince Frederick-Charles. Foch was a great admirer of this soldier, from whom, one fancies, he often inspired himself in his own times of trial.

"Why," asks Foch, "run these risks?" He dislikes intensely this method of banking on the probable, the reasonable assumption; this rigid type of preconceived plan which assigns a definite rôle to the enemy and expects him to fill it. Again, his solution is the same: *sûreté* provided by an advanced guard of all arms, the main body within easy marching distance of any point upon which it is likely to be desired to concentrate it, and the preservation of an open mind until the enemy is fixed.

He dislikes, too, the linear array which goes with the type of strategy adopted by Moltke. Against it he

constantly sets up what he calls the "battle of manœuvre" of Napoleon, with the main body closed up and so disposed that it can throw its whole weight in any required direction in a minimum period of time. He considered that a modern railway network would facilitate such dispositions. One can guess what he thought of the French linear array and preconceived manœuvre of 1914.

Yet in many respects Moltke was a soldier after the heart of Foch. He had trained his troops magnificently. He had imbued his subordinates with his own doctrine. On the field of battle they took the right course as though by instinct, but in fact as a result of his teaching; they were, one may say, soaked in it. Off the field of battle each one could be relied upon to march to the sound of the guns at top speed if a colleague were in trouble. In some ways he found it more valuable to study Moltke than Napoleon. The latter was a genius, and you cannot create genius by all the teaching and training in the world. On the other hand, every Chief of the General Staff can hope to create the offensive spirit, the good organization, the high standard of training, and above all "an élite carefully chosen and instructed, then turned loose with fullest confidence to the exercise of its own free initiative".

There is one other lesson in this second book, which, like the insistence on the offensive, has aroused criticism. It is the reiteration of Napoleon's saying that the moral is to the material as three to one. Here, undoubtedly, Foch permitted himself to use certain phrases which blurred the true lesson and made it easy for a false one to be imbibed. They are extravagant, but there is really no extravagance in his views. Military spirit, replies the opposition, will not put a machine gun out

of action, and you cannot get forward while it is in being. Foch did not say that you could. On the contrary, he remarks that modern arms are too *demoralizing* for moral superiority of itself to prevail; it must be allied to every attainable material advantage. The doctrine is, indeed, one of the most vital in military training. In the blackest hour the cool, determined, and experienced commander may at worst save something from the wreck; at best, he may suddenly find his adversary's guard open. The enemy, too, is only human; his bowels are wrung with pain and fear as well as yours. Hope need never be abandoned, because no situation is hopeless. You will not be beaten unless you admit you are beaten—and was that not to be illustrated by Foch in 1918? The converse is, you will be beaten if you admit you are beaten—and is not that precisely what happened to the Germans on the Marne?

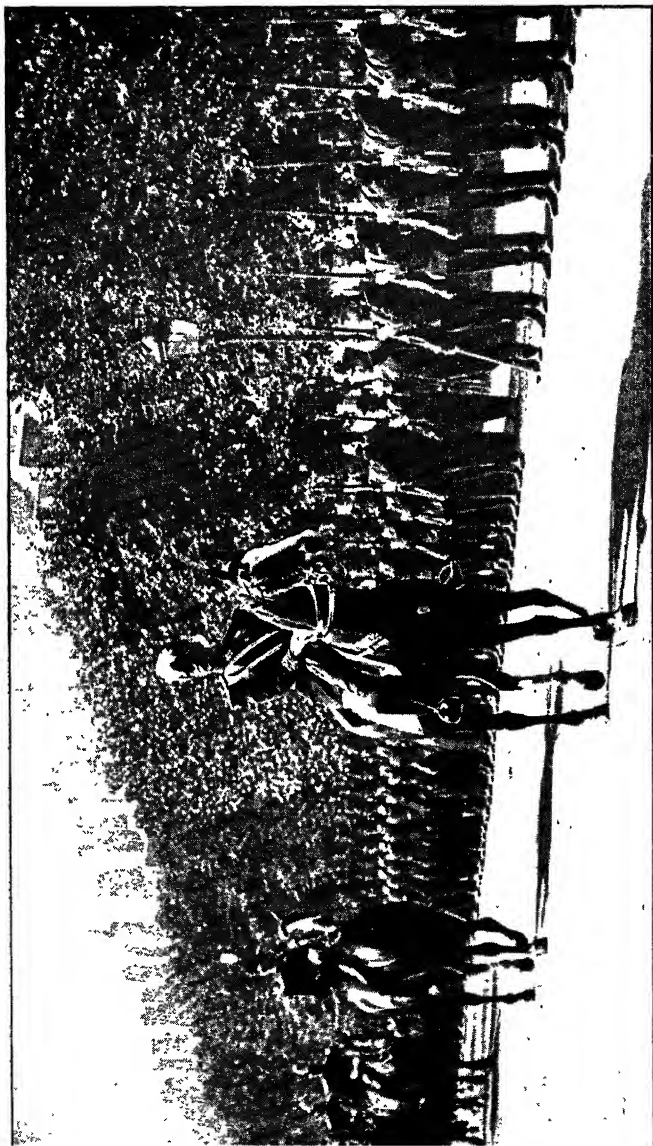
On the material side the lessons of Foch may be reduced, as, indeed, may his principles of war, to two: *sûreté*, comprising both protection of the commander's plans and dispositions from the enemy's interference, and knowledge of the enemy; and economy of force, the concentration of all available strength at the decisive point. The chief weakness of his teaching is his lack of insistence upon the value of surprise produced by deception. He is scarcely to be ranked with the handful of great theoretic initiators, of whom Clausewitz is by far the most important of modern times. This is not to belittle the work of Foch. His teaching was historical rather than theoretic, except for his treatment of modern fire-tactics. It was his masterly handling of concrete examples and his gift for impressing their significance upon his hearers which made him the outstanding military instructor of his age.

CHAPTER IV

PREPARATION

THE war-clouds of Agadir blew over, but there were more banked on the horizon. Foch busied himself with his division. In 1912 he was chief of the mission sent over to attend the British manœuvres in East Anglia. They were the best and most realistic recently held in this country and the first in which aircraft took part. Foch made some friendships with British officers, but had to rely on their knowledge of French. Like many senior French officers he was a good German scholar, but most unfortunately had no English. It is valuable to know the language of your future opponent in times of peace for the study of his military literature. In war it is ten times more valuable to know the language of your ally. For the translation of captured documents and the interrogation of prisoners there are intelligence officers; these duties are not the business of even junior commanders. To be able to converse easily with a colleague of another nation, without calling in interpreters—who are often, for some reason, thick-headed and ignorant, and who in the Great War frequently justified the army slang title of “interrupters”—is a priceless advantage.

At the end of 1912 Foch was promoted to the command of the VIII. Corps, at Bourges, in the centre of France. It was a good formation, and he was happy to be its chief, but he remained with it for only a short time. In August, 1913, he exchanged it for the XX. Corps at Nancy.



GENERAL FOCH ENTERING NANCY TO ASSUME COMMAND OF THE
XX. CORPS, 22ND AUGUST, 1913

This move from one corps to another was viewed as further promotion. The XX. Corps consisted of a cavalry division in addition to the normal two infantry divisions, and all three had reinforced effectives. They were *troupes de couverture*, a provision to ensure the safety of mobilization which was the answer to the problem studied by Foch in his analysis of Moltke's mobilization in 1870. Nancy was a bare ten miles from the frontier. The human material of French Lorraine was some of the finest in the land, and the XX. Corps was considered about the best in the French Army.

Its new commander was by now a well-known and popular figure. His coming to this outpost seemed to have a special significance, and there was personal warmth in the official reception. The city was beflagged as the General made his entry on the 22nd August, riding one of the beautiful blood horses which he always bestrode and on which he looked so soldierly a figure. In the evening there was a torch-light retreat, with six regimental bands blaring out the famous march, "Sambre et Meuse". That night Foch slept in the Palais du Gouvernement, where he had seen Manteuffel forty-two years earlier.

The average man approaching his sixty-second birthday is, as Foch himself remarked, beginning to think of retirement and a quiet life. For him there was an acceleration of effort. In consequence of the application of the Three Years' Service Law in November, there were three annual classes with the colours instead of two. Fresh accommodation had to be built for the extra troops. Work on the fortifications of Nancy was pushed forward and advanced lines of defence were planned. Training for war became more intense.

The manœuvres of 1914 came to an end on the

6th July. A week earlier, at a street corner in Serajevo, a spark had been lit which was now travelling along a fuse. France did not yet know it. She allowed the commander of her most vitally placed army corps to go on leave in the ordinary way, after the national festival of 14th July. On the 18th he left for Brittany, taking with him his two sons-in-law. His son could not at that moment obtain leave, and it is doubtful whether his father ever saw him again.

On 23rd July the notorious Austrian Note to Serbia was published. On the 26th Foch was recalled and reached Nancy next morning. On the 28th he was directed to take measures for keeping the frontier under observation. On the 29th he began the construction of field-works, linking up with entrenchments the forts on the irregular heights east and north-east of Nancy, known as the Grand Couronné. On the 30th he was ordered to cover the mobilization and concentration of the Second Army, of which his corps would form part. His instructions were to use one division for the purpose, keeping the second in reserve, but he wisely used the heads of both, moving the 11th Division out of Nancy on to the Grand Couronné and the 39th from Toul to south of the city. So anxious was France to avoid affording a pretext for war that Foch was ordered not to move troops to within ten kilometres, or six and a quarter miles, of the frontier.

On 1st August the order for mobilization arrived at 3.55 p.m. The ten-kilometre line was, however, actually maintained for some hours longer, and on the 2nd Foch was warned by the Commander-in-Chief, General Joffre, to leave the responsibility for hostilities to the Germans. That same day came news that they had invaded the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg. On the

4th they violated the neutrality of Belgium and also declared war on France.

At sixty-two the commander of the XX. Corps would have passed for some years younger, but in body he was far younger than in face. Constant walking and two hours a day in the saddle, even when he had much office work on his hands, had kept him hard and fit, alert and springy in step. As a soldier he was certainly not past his prime. On the other hand, long before that age we all of us, if we do not degenerate, at all events cease to progress—unless we are rudely confronted with experiences which force us to renewed mental activity. Foch, in his peace-time service, had had no such experiences. Yet when they came he was to prove that he could confront age's hardest task: adapt himself to circumstances and continue to learn from them. Above all, he was bringing to the struggle for which he had been preparing nerves of steel. The unexpected would not throw him out; defeat would not shake him; and victory would not unduly elate him. Though he had never fought, never heard a shot fired in anger, he knew all about the ups and downs of war.

CHAPTER V

OPPOSING FORCES, OPPOSING PLANS

THE French Army had been given time to throw off the worst of the moral sickness resulting from the Dreyfus case and the conflict between Church and State. There were still men holding high command for no better reason than that they were politically inclined to the Left, but fewer than formerly. Fortunately, too, there was a Commander-in-Chief who, himself the staunchest of Republicans and a Freemason, was not interested in politics and was quite prepared to promote or to break general officers irrespective of whether they were freethinkers or church-goers.

The army had been strengthened by the application of the Three Years' Service Law, passed to compensate France in some degree for the greater and rapidly growing man-power of Germany. It had a peace strength of over 700,000 men divided into 21 army corps, containing 44 infantry divisions, and 10 cavalry divisions. There were also unattached divisions in Algeria and Tunisia, while the garrison of the Moroccan protectorate would provide another. Mobilization, in addition to bringing the active divisions up to establishment, created 25 reserve divisions, and 12 territorial divisions from the older classes.

Germany's peace strength was little greater than that of France, about 800,000, but her resources were far larger and she had never called up for training nearly all her available men. She had a total mobilizable

population of ten millions. She could put immediately into the field 25 active army corps (50 divisions), 32 reserve divisions, 7 *Erstaz* divisions, and 11 cavalry divisions. She had actually allotted for the campaign in the West 23 active army corps, 11 reserve corps, 10 cavalry divisions, and 17 *Landwehr* brigades.

Mere figures, however, give no notion of her superiority. In the first place, while France drew upon almost every available man, Germany had been able to pick and choose, with the result that at the opening of hostilities her physical standard was considerably higher. In the second place, the first-line reservists called up were far more numerous than was needed to bring the active corps up to establishment. Active troops were therefore added to the reserve corps, one of which had a whole active division, while several had active brigades. And these reserve corps represented something for which there was no real equivalent in the French Army. They were well-armed fighting formations with full headquarters staffs and services. The French groups of reserve divisions, on the other hand, were, as the title implies, improvisations, and were inferior both in armament and in services.

In armament generally the Germans were superior, though they, like the British, were without a quick-firing field gun in the true sense. Their 77-mm. and the British 18-pdr. were slightly harder-hitting weapons than the French, but the famous "*soixante-quinze*" more than made up for this by its rapidity of fire and combined lightness and strength. On the other hand, the German divisional artillery was equipped with howitzers, whereas that of the French had none. In heavy artillery the Germans were again superior, with a higher proportion of howitzers. All through the war

the French suffered from a shortage of howitzers, which, especially in the type of siege warfare that developed, proved a grievous handicap. In all natures of guns the Germans had five, perhaps even six, pieces to the four of the French and British.

The quality on both sides was very high, though the musketry was poor by British standards. But to the eyes of an outside observer, who acquired a very fair knowledge of the German Army through intelligence work and of the French by acting as liaison officer, the Germans had one advantage which is not always recognized. German troops were remarkably even in quality. Bad German formations, at least on the Western Front, were almost unknown. Even *Landsturm*, the equivalent of the French Territorials, were often quite formidable in defence, and certainly superior to their French opponents of the same age. French divisions varied very greatly, especially at the outset when they were strictly territorial in composition. The best were superlatively good, the worst indifferent.

The doctrine of the offensive was held with equal strength and confidence by Germans and by French. The whole German plan, indeed, was based on the offensive *à outrance*, and the mass attacks made against the British at Mons are proof of how far this doctrine would carry German commanders. Yet of the two it was the French who were the more fully, one might say the more blindly, inspired by it. A sort of mysticism of the offensive, which is to-day, rightly or wrongly, associated with the name of General de Grandmaison, had crept into recent French teaching, and its foremost devotees almost suggested that artillery was redundant and that battles could be decided by dash and cold steel alone. There is no doubt that the hotheads,

seeking guidance from a man with more brains than their own, had delved in the quarries of Foch for material to support their theories. An occasional loose or over-optimistic phrase had thus to bear a heavy responsibility. Yet to pretend, as detractors have pretended, that this is the gist of his lectures can be the result only of deliberate misrepresentation or of failure to read them thoroughly. Over and over again Foch emphasized the importance of artillery preparation and support, and one of the chief lessons which he drew from the Action of Nachod was the efficiency of the German musketry as compared with the Austrian. But the new prophets, like many others before them, picked out the texts which suited them, and their prophecies gained many ears. In view of the inferior French equipment, this was to prove very unfortunate in the battles of the frontier and to bring France to the brink of disaster.

Immediately after their overwhelming defeat in the Franco-German War the French had introduced universal service in imitation of their conquerors. Successive General Staffs had also produced a series of plans to meet the eventuality of another war with Germany. As conditions altered, these plans were discarded in favour of fresh ones, till by 1913 the seventeenth variation had been reached. The circumstances which influenced the changes were the improvement of fortifications, the growth of railways, the introduction of the system of covering forces, the improved training and equipment of the African troops, and the attitude of other countries besides Germany. Thus, in 1903, relations with Great Britain were bad, and special arrangements for coast defence therefore appeared in Plan XV. The Franco-British Entente made it possible

to neglect this factor. Then, Plan XVI took account of the fact that Italy, bound to Germany by alliance, was engaged in war with Turkey. One factor considered as early as Plan IV was the possibility of a German violation of Belgian territory.

The bases of Plan XVII were that Italy was now unlikely to intervene against France; that Britain was likely to aid her at sea and possibly on land, though no British expeditionary force was definitely counted on; and that Germany had increased her effectives. Five French armies were to concentrate on the frontier: the First from the Swiss frontier to Lunéville, the Second thence to Pont-à-Mousson, the Third thence to north of Briey, the Fifth thence to north-east of Hirson. The Fourth was originally to have been placed about Bar-le-Duc in rear of the Second and Third, but as affairs developed it was brought into line on the right of the Third: the Fifth was shifted slightly farther north, and the British came in on its left.

It will thus be seen that provision was made to face a German turning movement through Belgium, but not north of the Meuse. The French intelligence service professed to know that this was not contemplated—it has even been suggested that false information was “planted” upon it; in any case, having little information about the reserve corps, it under-estimated the strength of the German forces and did not consider they could afford to extend their right into northern Belgium.

Plan XVII was really a plan of mobilization and concentration only. An offensive had been studied, on the lines of that eventually ordered by General Joffre, but it cannot actually be said to have formed part of the plan.

The German plan, on the other hand, prepared for every step, day by day, until the French armies should have been routed. That—apart from its immorality—was its weakest point. It set in movement a machine which it might be very difficult to control if anything went wrong, and it took little or no account of the enemy. It was a modification of that drawn up by a former Chief of the General Staff, Graf Schlieffen. Its basis was the slowness of Russian mobilization, which seemed to afford the possibility of putting France out of action by a lightning stroke. Russia would be dealt with by Austria in the south and held by a comparatively small force on the eastern frontier of Germany.

The Schlieffen Plan has not been made public in full, but we know its essence. It provided for the advance, on either side of Metz, of two masses, but masses of very different size. The right wing was to be seven times as strong as the left and was to wheel not only north of the Meuse through Belgium—which the French considered impossible—but even through Limburg, the south-eastern province of Holland. The great columns were to burst their way through Belgium, which might or might not resist, and the right army was to outflank the French, cross the Seine, pass round to the south of Paris, and then attack eastward. The weaker left wing was not to stand on the defensive, and there was even provision for a Cannæ on a gigantic scale and the envelopment of the French from both flanks.

For various reasons Colonel-General Helmuth von Moltke, nephew of the victor of 1870 and now Chief of the General Staff, modified the Schlieffen Plan. First, and probably wisely, he cut out the march through Dutch Limburg, which would have given Germany one more foe to fight. Then, he strengthened his left wing

somewhat at the expense of his right, though he had a scheme for reinforcing the right from the left later on. The left was now to act defensively at first, if possible luring the French into a trap and then striking back hard. Yet he maintained the basis of the scheme, and for a whole month it worked to its ambitious timetable. On the 31st day after mobilization, 1st September, the wheel was to take the armies to the line Amiens, La Fère, Rethel, Thionville. Despite the Belgian resistance, it did so.

The German plan was strategically brilliant, but it was founded upon the violation of Belgian neutrality, which Germany as well as France had solemnly undertaken to respect. The opposing forces could strike at one another only on a comparatively narrow and heavily fortified frontier unless one or the other invaded neutral territory. Germany had decided to do so.

Thus all was prepared for a struggle so vast, so chaotic, so lengthy, so fluctuating that leaders of high character and gifts were to be tossed about in it like little ships in an Atlantic gale. Now and again there would be an answer to the tiller, and skill would for a moment appear to be coming into its own. Then the elements would resume their sway, and the fate of the craft would lie at their mercy or at the caprice of chance. In truth, human brains had created what was almost a Frankenstein's monster, forces not entirely beyond their control but controllable only intermittently. There were to be grievous mistakes. There were to be countless disappointments and refutations of confident prophecies. High commanders, including the younger Moltke himself, were to be broken by despair at their apparent helplessness. The moral din would deafen and stupefy them as the drum-fire of the artillery

stunned their troops. Brains and experience were to prove often of little avail, never of any at all without exceptional strength of character. To survive mentally and morally was the leader's task, and it was not much easier than for the fighting formations to survive physically. He who could wake up each morning to find ever new problems awaiting his attention and could face them coolly and objectively was the likeliest survivor. *De quoi s'agit-il?*

CHAPTER VI

FIRST ENCOUNTER

WAR having been declared, the Commander-in-Chief's restrictions on the movements of the covering forces naturally lapsed. Foch pushed cavalry reconnaissances forward to the Seille, the little river which for some distance marked the frontier. Then, after driving in small parties of German cavalry and cyclists, he occupied the line of the stream with detachments of all arms. The enemy remained inactive, and that his policy was for the time being defensive was proved by his having cut through a dam on a sheet of water known as the Etang de Lindre and partially flooded the valley.

The XX. Corps had had ten days of watching and digging, often in rain. On 8th August the arrival of the IX. and XV. Corps began and made it possible to give it a rest. General de Castelnau, one of the best soldiers produced by France in the course of the war, took over command of the Second Army. The period of *couverture* had been trying, but had been carried out in an orderly way, according to plan. The mobilization had been accomplished without hitch.

The situation on the eastern frontier was conditioned by the great fortified area of Metz—Thionville, which had been created by the Germans since the annexation of Lorraine. The original French plan was to launch at the earliest possible moment two attacks: one, on the right, between the wooded massif of the Vosges

and Nancy; the other between Metz and Verdun. A small new army, known as the Army of Alsace, was formed on the extreme right under the command of General Pau on 13th August, succeeding in its rôle a detachment of the First Army which had already made a reconnaissance in force into Alsace. The invasion of Belgium on an unexpectedly large scale did not alter the plan of the Generalissimo, though two corps were now to be withdrawn from the Second Army, which, with the First (General Dubail) on its right, was to carry out the chief rôle in the Lorraine offensive. Covering its left flank in the direction of the fortifications of Metz, the Second Army was to advance in the general direction of Saarebourg. Learning that the Russians were attacking on the 14th, General Joffre decided to do likewise. He allowed General de Castelnau to keep the IX. Corps, one of the two which were to be withdrawn, to cover his left until the group of reserve divisions detailed for that rôle was ready to take its place.

The protective zone originally held by the XX. Corps alone had now been divided into three, and was held by the XVI. Corps on the right, the XV. in the centre, and the XX. on the left.

The invasion of German Lorraine was a difficult and not altogether a promising venture. In the first place, it involved marching past and exposing the left flank to the fortress of Metz. In the second, the country was broken by abrupt wooded hills, many streams, and occasional lakes and marshes. It was very blind country, in which a surprise counterstroke would be easy, especially with such a *place d'armes* as Metz on the flank. Moreover, it was far distant from the area which the German movements had already revealed to be

the main battlefield, and to reach the communications of even the southernmost of the German armies engaged in the great wheel would involve a very long advance. The operation could be regarded in the present circumstances only as a diversion in favour of the new offensive which General Joffre had decided to launch against the flank of the German columns farther north. And for a diversion it was too big and engaged too many troops.

General de Castelnau ordered his XVI. Corps to march on Avricourt, the XV. on Hellocourt, and the XX. on the crest between Donnelay and Juvelize, beyond the Moyenvic-Maizières highway and three and three-quarter miles beyond the German frontier. In view of some of the criticisms of this offensive, it must be noted that there was, at least at the start, nothing impetuous in the methods of the Army Commander. He instructed the three corps to advance by bounds, always strongly supported by artillery.

So, on the morning of 14th August, the war really began for Foch. At 7 a.m. the XX. Corps moved forward, 11th Division on the right, 39th on the left. All was easy at first. The hostile outposts fell back without fighting. In the afternoon, however, affairs were different. The German infantry held off, but the French were assailed by the fire of artillery, much of which was of greater range than their own and could not be reached by it. The range-marks wherewith the frontier was studded made this fire particularly accurate. Still, the XX. Corps pushed on and dug in on that day's objective. Foch moved his headquarters up to Serres. "There was," he remarks in his memoirs, "matter for astonishment in the revelations resulting from the meeting of two great armies after forty years of peace." It is an

honest admission that there was much to learn. Meanwhile, it was necessary to restrain the ardent French troops and prepare each step forward with care.

Next day, the 15th, the XX. Corps had to cover the attack of the XV. on Maizières, not moving until the latter had come up to its level. But the XV. was checked; it had suffered somewhat heavily on the 14th and was now relieving its leading division. The XX. was thus, by virtue of its orders, immobilized all day, under the fire of heavy artillery. The offensive was to be resumed next morning.

On the 16th, however, the enemy was gone, abandoning no guns but a good deal of ammunition. The country people said he had begun to retire the previous morning. The few prisoners picked up spoke feelingly of the effect of the "seventy-fives", so not all the suffering had been on the French side. That night the XX. Corps held the objective originally assigned to it, the Donnelay-Juvelize ridge, with left astride the Seille south of Château-Salins.

Orders had now been received to wheel right and continue the advance in a northerly direction. On the 17th, therefore, the army swung up its right and closed somewhat on its left. There was rain all day, which caused discomfort to the troops who, in consequence of the change of direction, were all on the move. The cavalry occupied Château-Salins with little opposition. Next day the swing continued, the right meeting with very slight resistance as it moved up, and the move was finished by afternoon. At the junction between the French First and Second Armies the Germans abandoned Sarrebourg.

Meanwhile General Joffre had called upon the two Army Commanders to increase the vigour of their

action and attack northward. General de Castelnau, in issuing his instructions for next day's action, directed that the advance should be marked by energy and dash, and requested the corps commanders to inspire their troops with a spirit more aggressive than that required in face of a prepared position. Foch did not care about the situation. It had been rather too easy. The enemy had not been engaged heavily enough to warrant this retreat. The Second Army's left flank, covered by three reserve divisions on a front of thirty miles, was ill protected. Nevertheless, he showed no disposition to wait for the right of the army when it dropped behind, but continued to push on, perhaps somewhat rashly, seeing that there was a fortress with a large mobile garrison on his flank, but without contravening the spirit of his instructions.

On 19th August the XX. Corps reached the outskirts of Morhange, being now twelve miles over the frontier. It had met with little opposition during the first stage of this advance, but had come under heavy fire later on. Foch decided to postpone the attack on the strong Morhange position—to be carried out by the 11th Division, the 39th assisting in the artillery preparation—till the morning. The two Corps on his right were considerably in rear, the XV. having made only slight progress beyond the Seille and the XVI. being stuck on the Canal des Salines.

General de Castelnau, however, directed the XX. Corps to stand fast on the 20th, while the others got forward. The message was delayed, probably because Foch was moving from his headquarters to an advanced command post. He for his part, in accordance with the general instructions for the offensive, ordered his troops to capture the Morhange position at 6 a.m.

On getting a copy of this order, Castelnau sent a staff officer to explain the situation and inform the XX. Corps that it might be attacked from the direction of Metz. He also telegraphed, "I absolutely forbid you to continue your offensive to-day". This was strong enough, and much has been made of the incident. It had no effect upon events, though it showed that the Army and Corps Commanders were not in sympathy. Before the hour fixed for the French assault, the commander of the German Sixth Army, Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, struck back with all his might.

The young Bavarian had been instructed to let the French advance still further before counter-attacking, but he could not bear to be left out of the picture any longer. Against the XX. Corps he flung three divisions in a frontal attack, with a fourth in close support, while portions of those operating on either side swung inwards against its exposed flanks. The other two Corps had to face no such odds, but they fared worse.

The fight that followed is known as the Battle of Morhange; Morhange was on the front of the XX. Corps; and the French were well beaten. Yet the Germans gained no decision against the XX. Corps, though it was far in advance of the troops on either flank. The 39th Division was driven back on to the forest of Château-Salins and very roughly handled, but the 11th on the right lost less ground. It was an unpleasant surprise, the losses being serious; but after the first shock affairs became easier, owing to the increased range at which the German artillery was now firing. Foch even prepared a stroke on his right, against the Haut de Koecking, to aid the XV. Corps, which he heard was in serious trouble. He was astonished when he received orders for a general retreat. "If ever," he

confessed to Colonel Duchêne, his Chief of the Staff, "if ever I was tempted to disobey, it is to-day." "You don't know what is happening to the neighbouring Corps," said Duchêne.

It was worse than he had imagined. Both Corps were so shaken that little reliance could be placed upon them. Not to put too fine a point upon it, the men of Provence were unable to stand the strain. On his left the covering force also was being driven back.

The first instructions received by Foch were to cover the retreat, holding a bridgehead at Château-Salins as long as possible. He found no difficulty in breaking off the action, and was not worried by the slack pursuit. He was confident of being able to hold the line of the Seille, but Castelnau would have none of it. "You had better slip away," came the message on the night of the 20th.

The weary troops thus got no rest that night. They had to resume their march, cursing as they threaded their way along roads packed with transport, civilian as well as military. Castelnau was determined to get them behind the Meurthe and reorganize them. He was right in this, but showed undue despondency when he suggested a further withdrawal to the heights of the Meuse. Joffre from above and Foch from below dissuaded him. ("They won't walk over the XX. Corps.") The Second Army halted just to the south of its old position on the Grand Couronné, which latter was to be held by two reserve divisions and part of the IX. Corps still available. The XX. Corps was placed in reserve, but on the 22nd it had to send a brigade of the 11th Division over the Meurthe to cover the withdrawal of the XV. Corps. It was on this day, not very far off, at Gorcy in the Department of the Meuse, that

the *Aspirant* (Cadet) Germain Foch, 131st Infantry, fell in battle at the age of twenty-five years. His father was not to hear the news for three weeks.

Reorganization was carried out quickly, but only just in time. On the 24th it was reported that the Germans were pressing forward into the famous gap in the French defences known as the "Trouée de Charmes" and thus exposing their right flank. Castelnau at once ordered an attack to relieve the pressure on the First Army. The XX. Corps crossed the river and made its way forward for a distance of some two miles. The Germans hit back, and there was hard and fluctuating fighting. Next day the struggle became intense, but the XX. Corps made some further ground. Castelnau ordered efforts to be redoubled, setting the ambitious objective of the Lunéville-Moyenvic road. On the 27th the 39th Division made little progress north of the Sanon, but south of the stream the 11th pressed on. On the 28th it seized the height known as the Signal de Friscati overlooking Lunéville. The XV. and XVI. Corps had pulled themselves together in praiseworthy fashion and kept pace. The enemy abandoned his effort.

There was more fighting, but Foch did not see it. He had received an order to hand over the XX. Corps to General Balfourier, who had so stoutly led the gallant 11th Division, and to report at the Grand-Quartier-Général before taking over another command. He was then just north of the Forêt de Vitrimont at an inn called—who shall say not symbolically?—"Les Œufs durs". He was to leave the staff for the new Corps Commander but was directed to pick up two officers, Lieutenant-Colonels Weygand and Devaux, to form the nucleus of a new one. Weygand, stationed in

the forest with his cavalry regiment, was actually sitting his horse and about to move off on reconnaissance when Foch, with a typical sweeping gesture, signalled to him to dismount. It is not every day that commanders pick up chief staff officers of his calibre more or less by hazard in a wood, like blackberries off a bush. In this case there was a misapprehension, not discovered until some two years later, which was fortunate for both men. Devaux, who had passed through the School of War, was to have been Chief, and Weygand Sub-Chief; but Foch, finding that Weygand was the senior Lieut.-Colonel, decided that it should be the other way about. This, as General Weygand remarks, was *chic* in the man who was looked upon as the incarnation of the School. After a farewell order had been addressed to the well-beloved XX. Corps, the cars set off for Vitry-le-François.

So in his first engagement Foch had been involved in a defeat. The defeat of Morhange did not daunt him any more than the lesser but still successful counter-stroke, the Battle of the Mortagne, elated him. He bore away with him two impressions. The first and more important was that of the German superiority in artillery resources. The second was that of the incredible boldness with which the enemy had bored into the Trouée de Charmes, disregarding a strong force lying on the flank of his columns. The former factor would take long to remedy; of the latter tendency there might be opportunity to take advantage sooner, but how very soon he was not to guess.

CHAPTER VII

BACK FROM THE FRONTIER

INCREDIBLE though it may appear, Foch knew virtually nothing of events outside Lorraine as he drove to the Grand-Quartier-Général on 28th August. In Lorraine they had been favourable enough during the last few days. In the afternoon he heard very different news from the rest of the front. The French armies of the centre and left and the British Expeditionary Force with them were in full retreat. The nature of the German swing was fully apparent now; the enemy was marching fast on Paris.

It had all occurred in the course of a week. On the 20th August, before the German counterstroke in Lorraine, all had seemed well. Next day General Joffre had ordered an offensive on the front of his Third, Fourth, and Fifth Armies and the British Army. The rôles of the two first-named were the most important; for they were to strike at the flank of the German columns, the Third in Luxembourg, the Fourth in the Ardennes. In a series of frontier battles, each in itself comparatively small though in sum they amounted to a great engagement, the enemy had been victorious. It was an ugly blow materially, but morally far worse. Division for division, the Germans had proved themselves harder hitting and more skilled in manoeuvre. Some of the French leadership had been bad, rash at one moment and timid at the next. If the Germans

could win with such comparative ease on the frontiers, what was to prevent their winning everywhere? How were they to be stopped?

General Joffre had evolved a new plan out of the wreckage of the old. He had decided to fall back on Verdun, the Aisne north of Reims, and the Somme, organize a fresh force on his left flank—for which purpose he created the Sixth Army, from troops collected wherever he could find them, on the 27th and ordered it to assemble about Amiens—and return to the offensive when opportunity offered. The next few days had been unfavourable but less devoid of hope. The Fourth Army had fought gallantly on the Meuse and had checked the German advance. On this very day, the 28th, there had been terrific fighting. Joffre had, however, clung to his decision, and had bidden the Army Commander, General de Langle de Cary, withdraw to the Aisne. He had meanwhile noted that the fighting was tending to draw the Fourth and Fifth Armies apart, and that a gap was appearing. The Fourth Army was also rather big for one staff to control in such circumstances. That was why he had sent for Foch.

It was some consolation that there was no fuss or excitement at Vitry. The Commander-in-Chief, facing the probability of another 1870, was cool and unperturbed. He has had many critics, most of whom in his place would by this time have been in a state of collapse. A temperament such as his is worth much gold when affairs are critical. Foch dined and stayed the night. Next morning he was appointed to command a detachment on the left flank of the Fourth Army and chiefly drawn from it. It was to consist of the IX. and XI. Corps, a cavalry division, two reserve divisions, and,

when it arrived from the Third Army, the 42nd Division. He collected a few more staff officers, one of them, an interpreter named André Tardieu, a future Prime Minister of France, and drove off.

"You're sent by Providence!" cried General de Langle de Cary, when Foch reported to him at Machault. What he had to hand over was not brilliant. The XI. Corps was in tatters after the hard fighting on the frontier and on the Meuse. The IX. Corps was in far better case, but was a thing of patches. It had, we may recall, been in Lorraine at the outset, and half of it, including artillery, had been left there. The rest had been thrown into one division, the 17th, and another, the Moroccan, had been brought in. This, in its turn, was an improvised formation and was short of artillery, but it was commanded by an exceptionally able and resolute Alsatian named Humbert, who was to rise to the top of the tree. Finally, the reserve divisions were, for the moment at least, an undisciplined rabble, terrible among the wine-cellars but innocuous elsewhere.

Foch found his detachment on the Aisne, its centre about Rethel, and about to be driven over the river. His first order was for the recapture of the heights north of the Aisne, not so much because he hoped to hold them as to secure the bridges for as long as possible and cover the Fourth Army's flank. There was a muddle. The orders were late in arriving and the enemy all too early. On the 30th, therefore, he decided to abandon the Aisne and to withdraw to one of its southern tributaries, the Retourne brook. What he had already seen had convinced him that reorganization was the most urgent problem. He must get the reserve divisions to the rear and prevent them from contaminating his other troops until he had weeded out their officers.

It was in this spirit that he answered next day a personal question from General Joffre. General de Langle de Cary was burning to strike back; could Foch hold his ground if he did? Two days, no more, said Foch. There was no readily defensible position; he was short of artillery; and his troops were very tired. Joffre accepted this view and bade the Fourth Army Commander continue the retreat.

Next day, 1st September, Foch, already engaged on the Retourne, disengaged himself and fell back behind rear guards to the Vesle, a distance of some ten miles. The IX. Corps had beaten off heavy attacks, but had had to cover the retreat of the XI. The latter had need of the breathing-space thus obtained. On the 2nd Foch made only a very slight withdrawal, and established touch with the Fifth Army on his left. His most serious anxiety was over now. So far as the Fourth Army and the detachment under his command were concerned, they could stand or strike back when called upon; but the Fifth on the left was still in trouble, having been dangerously outflanked on its left, where the British were far in rear. On the 3rd, therefore, in torrid heat, Foch withdrew to the Montagne de Reims. Here, if anywhere, was a good position for a stand, but he was ordered back again. On the 4th he retired his main body to the national road running west from Châlons-sur-Marne. The troops were greatly fatigued by the blocking of the roads by throngs of civilians streaming away in front of the Germans. Only those who have seen the high-piled wains with the old or bedridden lying on mattresses atop of a mountain of possessions, the weary children driving cattle and sheep, the very poor with perhaps no vehicles but wheelbarrows, can realize what it means to have an invader on the country's soil.

Foch was forced to direct that these unfortunates should be kept off the roads till 3 p.m.

That night came the order for which he had been waiting. Galliéni, the Military Governor of Paris, had prevailed upon Joffre to return to the offensive on the 6th. What had happened is common knowledge. The German First Army under General von Kluck had swung east of Paris, exposing its flank to the entrenched camp. The French Sixth Army was about to strike at its right—it came into action on the 5th—and on the 6th a general counter-offensive was to be launched by, from left to right, the Sixth Army, the British, and the Fifth Army, covered on its right by Foch. From that morning, too, the detachment of Foch became the Ninth Army, and he was for the first time independent of de Langle. The remaining division of the IX. Corps, the 18th, brought across from Lorraine, was to join him. He had also received drafts to fill the gaps in his ranks.

The orders already issued would have taken his army much too far to the rear, so Foch cancelled them, directing the troops to stand fast, and in certain cases to turn about. He was now to fight his third battle.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MARNE

IT has become a platitude that the Marne is not only one of the decisive battles of history, but also the decisive battle of the Great War. Looking back now, we see that Germany was never to have, not even when her troops reached the Marne again in 1918, such another chance. The Battle of the Marne won the war for France and lost it for Germany.

It is strange that this should be so. It was not an engagement in which the defeated side was overwhelmed. On the whole front there was really only one point where the ultimate victors had the better of the struggle, while the struggle lasted. The vanquished lost few prisoners and guns. Why and how were they defeated?

It is a most complicated battle, and the number of men in France, Germany and Britain who understand it completely in all its intricacies and fluxes can probably be counted upon the fingers of both hands. Fortunately for this biography, its author requires no such knowledge. He has but to outline its general features and record in rather more detail the part played in it by one Army Commander.

The outline, as regards the decisive western half of the battlefield, between Vitry-le-François and Paris, is simple. The German First Army Commander, General von Kluck, assailed on his right by the French Sixth Army, changed front to his right with the intention of driving his foe back into Paris. As he did so,

Joffre gave the order for the counter-offensive. Into the gap between the German First and Second Armies created by the stripping, Corps by Corps, of the First's original front marched the British Army and the left wing of the French Fifth, while the Fifth enlarged the breach by striking north-eastward. Meanwhile, the Ninth Army under Foch, though steadily losing ground in face of fierce assaults, held just long enough, till the outmanœuvred German commanders, independently or on orders brought by a staff officer named Hentsch, ordered a retreat to avoid the destruction of their right wing. We need not enter into the controversies among the defeated as to why they went back and who was responsible for the defeat. They went back and they were defeated.

Foch had directed the XI. Corps to hold the line of the Châlons-Troyes road from Sommesous to Morains-le-Petit, the 9th Cavalry Division securing as far as possible the wide gap which had appeared between his right and the left of the Fourth Army. The country on this flank was very slightly undulating and without natural obstacles, except for the bend of a stream, the Somme, generally known as the Somme-Soude to distinguish it from the river famous in this as in many another war. The left, the sector of the IX. Corps, was very different. Here, on either bank of the Petit Morin, lay the famous Marais de Saint-Gond. The marsh, impassable except by the roads, ran from east to west, a trough over ten miles long and from three-quarters of a mile to something over two miles in breadth. Overhanging it to the west was the chalk plateau of Sézanne, through which the Petit Morin cut its way in a narrow channel. On a spur of this plateau, raised above the marsh, lay the little village of Mondement.

Foch ordered the IX. Corps under General Dubois to secure the heights north of the marshes with strong detachments and at all hazards to prevent the enemy capturing the crossings. The 42nd Division he ordered to ascend the plateau of Sézanne in order to take part in the offensive of the Fifth Army next day. This move was in exact accordance with his orders from Joffre, but the latter had not bidden him hold the heights north of the Petit Morin.

The position, far from easily defensible on his right, was excellent on his left. It chanced, unfortunately and irremediably, that his best and best-commanded troops were on his left. The XI. Corps had good material—his own Bretons—but it had been very highly tried and was in a very nervous state.

The 6th September, the first day of the battle, witnessed hard fighting on the greater part of the front of the Ninth Army. The right wing of the German Third Army and left wing of the Second attacked with all the confidence of troops hitherto victorious and now in hopes of reaching a favourable decision.

The XI. Corps lost Normée, Ecury and Morains-le-Petit, and the line of the Somme between them. On the right the river was held at Lenharrée—where the defence was gallant—and thence eastward to Sommesous, though perhaps only because the attack here was not serious. The troops of this Corps were undoubtedly unreliable and had shown signs of panic at more than one point. Still, so far the enemy's progress was small, and he had not discovered the gap on the right, covered only by the cavalry. He had, as we now know, suffered heavily and been considerably impressed by the defence. Fortunately, the 18th Division was now arriving to support the XI. Corps.

The IX. Corps had a hard day. There were delays in the occupation of the outposts north of the marshes. The important one of Congy was found strongly held, and was never taken by the Moroccan Division. All were lost before nightfall. The troops fell back to the southern edge of the trough, which the enemy succeeded in crossing at Bannes. Caught by the fire of the "seventy-fives", he was, however, unable to debouch. On the left, where the 42nd Division was on the edge of the Sézanne plateau, the combat swayed to and fro at Villeneuve, which changed hands three times. It finally remained in those of the 42nd Division, thanks to the aid of the X. Corps, on the right of the Fifth Army. In this fighting, where many senior officers took a prominent part, none more distinguished himself than the commander of the 151st Regiment, Colonel Deville, who was afterwards to command the 42nd Division, and whose name is as intimately associated with it as that of General Grossetti himself.¹

The orders issued by Foch for the 7th deserve attention; for they were to be repeated in principle many times in the course of the war. His main task was obviously to prevent the enemy from debouching south of the marshes. He therefore ordered the IX. Corps to stand fast at all hazards, except that its left, the Moroccan Division, was to keep touch with the 42nd Division, which was to continue the attack of the previous day. There was nothing out of the way in this; it was, in fact, an exact translation of the will of the Commander-

¹ The writer may perhaps be permitted to recall thus a revered personality. Four years later he was staff officer permanently attached for liaison duties to whichever French division was on the British right. On the great day of the 8th August, 1918, this division was the 42nd, magnificently commanded by General Deville. To have been cited by such a soldier in the orders of such a division is an honour impossible to over-estimate or to forget.

in-Chief. But the frail XI. Corps was ordered, not, as one might expect, to hold on, not even to recover its lost position on the reach of the Somme which ran north-west, but to secure a new one on the farther reach running north-east, three and a half miles from its present line. Foch informed its commander quite truly that the Fifth Army was doing well, but was certainly asking a great deal of him. It is probable that he would have been surprised to learn that the Bretons had reached the bend of the Somme at Clamanges.

Often and often thereafter he ordered attacks to be launched by just those troops least likely to reach their objectives. His theory was that only the steadiest troops, well in hand, can resist an attack in cold blood; if one wanted their weaker brethren not to lose ground, or even to limit the extent of their loss, the best chance of achieving one's object was to bid them go forward.

Go forward the XI. Corps did not, and apparently only a few units tried to. It was the enemy who made ground, though very little. He captured Lenharrée and Vassimont. On the right he penetrated Sommesous, but was driven out again by the cavalry, with the aid of the 60th Reserve Division. On the whole, the XI. Corps did not have a bad day. We have a pleasant story of a message of encouragement sent to one of its regiments.

Foch had had one great stroke of luck. His staff had been collected haphazard: Weygand and Devaux, Chief and Sub-Chief, in Lorraine; Naulin, of the 2nd (Intelligence) Bureau, Requin and Tardieu from the Grand-Quartier-Général. Commandant Desticker, an extremely capable, cool-headed gunner, who became chief of the 3rd (Operations) Bureau, and Captain Audibert, of the 1st (Administration) Bureau, had

joined just afterwards. All through the Battle of the Marne Foch was short of officers, but those he had were exceptionally good. He used them to the limit of their strength. The writer of these lines, who has known and loved the French Army, has often felt that there was a tendency among French staff officers to sit too much over the telephone and see too little for themselves. That was never the case at the headquarters of Foch. He liked to see what he could himself, and liked his staff to see what he could not. On 31st August, when his detachment was on the Retourne, an officer calling at his headquarters at Somme-Py found Lieutenant Tardieu dictating from some notes an order which was being written out by the medical officer. This was the staff; the others were out visiting corps or divisions. Whatever his command, his staff formed a personal link with subordinates.

Never in the history of war has a commander been better served than was Foch. He knew it well. Speaking of decisions given and anxieties experienced in the Battle of the Marne, he constantly uses the plural "we". It is not here the ordinary narrative substitute for "I"; he means always "we of the headquarters of the Ninth Army".

The message of encouragement of which we have spoken was sent to the 65th Regiment on the left of the XI. Corps. The colonel was in a state of depression. The heat was stifling, and at a moment when he was expecting an attack, in the early afternoon, he found the streets of Fère-Champenoise, three miles behind his front, full of water-parties. "Are we on the battlefield or on manœuvres?" he asked indignantly.

To him appeared Commandant Naulin, calm and almost gay. The general, he said, was satisfied, and

affairs were not going at all badly. He took out a map and explained the general situation. The colonel spoke feelingly of the ebb and flow of his front. Naulin "smiled and said that that made no difference in the long run; we were, after all, on the spot where the Army Commander wanted to see us. His air, as he said this, was convinced and full of confidence."¹ The value of such contacts in hours when nerves are strained cannot be exaggerated.

On the left wing the fighting had been far fiercer, but again with comparatively little change in the situation. It was beginning to appear that the sector of the marsh itself was relatively safe. The enemy might cross it, but he could not deploy beyond it. On its western edge the Moroccan Division was heavily engaged. Farther west the 42nd Division had evacuated Ville-neuve during the night, on the order of General Grossetti, who believed that the X. Corps on his left had given ground, and greatly to the disgust of Colonel Deville. The 42nd retook the place at 10 a.m. There was some ebb and flow here all day, but the 42nd carried out its essential rôle of keeping touch with the Fifth Army.

A curious incident occurred that evening, of which Foch probably never learnt the details, but which was to have a remarkable effect on the future course of the battle. The 17th Division had as Chief of the Staff what the British call a "thruster". His name was Commandant Jette. He was a well-known character, who could on occasion bend his superiors to his will. Believing that Aulnizeux, north of the marsh, was not strongly held, he worried his divisional commander, against the latter's better judgment, into giving him permission to reconnoitre it in force. At 4.30 p.m. he

¹ Villate, p. 137.

sent a company across the marsh, but it was driven back by the enemy's fire. Still unconvinced, he decided to lead a night attack himself, and persuaded the local regimental commander to allot him three companies. He captured Aulnizeux. There was a counter-attack, a hand-to-hand fight in the darkness, and the French fell back over the marsh to Bannes, leaving in the village the dead body of Commandant Jette.

The divisional staff veiled the details, but the Germans did not. The night attack "by some two battalions", "in the back" of the German Guard Corps—which was then side-stepping to its left in order to get clear of the marsh—spread alarm up to Second Army headquarters. General von Bülow was already worried by the prospect of a breach between the X. and the Guard Corps, and this was the last straw. He now actually ordered the X. Corps to withdraw north of the Petit Morin. More, a division in reserve was hastily marched across eastwards from north of Montmirail towards Champaubert, and was thus not available when urgently needed later on to meet the triumphant advance of the French Fifth Army. It made things worse for Foch, but it was to the general profit of the French. A night attack at such a moment was, in fact, a heaven-sent inspiration. Light lie the soil on Commandant Jette, one of the victors of the Marne!

News on the evening of the 7th was excellent. The Fifth Army and the British were driving forward.

Yet the hour of trial was to come. The 8th September was, frankly, a day of disaster for the Ninth Army. General von Hausen, commanding the Third Army, hearing that affairs were going none too well with Kluck and with Bülow's right, had determined to smash the enemy on his immediate front. The side-step of the

Guard—handed over to him by Bülow—to the east was in preparation for an attack before dawn on the whole front between the marshes and Sommesous. Four divisions were thrown against the remnants of the battered XI. Corps, part of the 18th Division attached to it, and the flank of the 63rd Reserve Division at Sommesous. Some units actually took the bolts out of their rifles to ensure that a chance shot should not rob them of surprise.

It was a smashing blow. Whole companies of the weary French troops were caught asleep without outpost precautions. Isolated groups fought well and inflicted heavy loss upon the enemy, but the whole right wing of the army collapsed. The troops streamed back in disorder; the Germans followed them across the Fère-Champenoise—Sommesous road. The French were only rallied on the high ground south of the road after having fallen back from three to four and a half miles. The IX. Corps had to refuse its right, and the enemy quickly took advantage of the movement, seizing Broussy-le-Petit and Oyes. On the left the fighting was almost stationary, the 42nd Division being unable to cross the Petit Morin.

At dusk, in response to urgent and repeated exhortations from Foch, two regiments of the 52nd Reserve Division made a plucky counter-attack on Fère-Champenoise and actually reached it, but fell back on receiving an unauthorized order to withdraw. It was enough to show that there was, after all, good stuff in these troops, if properly organized and led.

Afterwards, as age advanced and his gestures became more extravagant, Foch used to thrust his left arm forward and grip with all his strength the arm of his chair, at the same time thrusting his right shoulder

back as far as it would go. Such, he would say, was his situation in the Battle of the Marne. If the grip of his left hand held, if he maintained touch with the advancing Fifth Army, all would be well. And the knuckles of the left hand represented the village of Mondement.

Foch telephoned right and left. From the right, comfort was cold. General de Langle de Cary was sending the XXI. Corps to plug the gaping breach between his army and the Ninth, but it would not arrive that day. From the left, General d'Espérey assured him that the primary task of his right wing was to aid the Ninth Army. He did even better when Foch rang him up again in the evening. Foch might exhort the XI. Corps to stand fast, but those troops in their present condition wanted more tangible support. Where could he find it? The IX. Corps was strung out on a big front. But on his extreme left was the 42nd Division, constituting his best troops. Could he disengage it and swing it across from the left to the right centre? He asked Franchet d'Espérey to relieve it. The reply was in effect: "Take over my X. Corps and carry out the relief yourself."

Marshal d'Espérey has been blamed for this abnegation and indeed for the general inclination to the north-east which he gave to his army in order to aid Foch. His orders were to attack due north, and he should, say his critics, have hardened his heart and driven straight forward. "Let Moreau go even to Vienna!" exclaimed the Archduke Charles. "It will not matter much if I beat Jourdan." The Fifth Army was in a winning position. Its left was advancing swiftly; it had perhaps an opportunity to spread confusion in the ranks of the retreating enemy. "Let Bülow and Hausen beat Foch; it will not matter much if Maunoury and

the British and I annihilate Kluck," is what, according to these critics, he should have said.

It may be so. It is not easy to strike a balance from the pros and cons. But one thing is certain. No finer example of generosity and comradeship is to be found in military history than the action of the Fifth Army Commander on the 8th September.

In the stirring and heartening situation report issued by Foch, he spoke of the threat to the German right and of the difficult rôle of his own army. He concluded: "The general situation is therefore excellent, and the attack directed against the Ninth Army appears to have been launched to cover the retreat of the German right wing." This was the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Legend has made of it: "My right is driven in; my left is giving ground; the situation is excellent; I am attacking." Legend here, as often, deforms the fact but not the spirit.

In truth, Foch now hoped at best to hold fast on his whole front, except that just taken over from the Fifth Army. There the right of the X. Corps was to relieve the 42nd Division, while the left attacked due eastward north of the marsh. The 42nd was to be brought across to the neighbourhood of Linthes and to form the kernel of a counter-attack on Fère-Champenoise.

The expected blows fell on the morning of the 9th. The XI. Corps was driven back behind the Maurienne. The right of the IX. Corps lost the important height of Mont-Août. Worse, the Moroccan Division lost the Château of Mondement, which two desperate counter-attacks failed to recover, and the 42nd Division, crossing behind its front, had to detach infantry and artillery to its aid. (Actually, the Germans who took Mondement had acted in disobedience of orders; they should have

stood fast to cover the retreat of the line farther west. War is full of such ironies.) The X. Corps, despite appeals rained upon it from army headquarters, made little or no progress. The staff raced from point to point, calling for another effort, for resolution, for haste.

Meanwhile the 42nd Division, in semi-artillery order, was marching eastward, as if on manoeuvres, a magnificent spectacle, at its head the huge form of General Grossetti on horseback, his pennon at his side. Foch used to say afterwards that if the battle were to be refought he would himself lead the division into action, unit by unit. One of Grossetti's subordinates, considering not only the need for haste but the risk from hostile aircraft, actually urged this course upon his chief, to meet with the reply: "I am going into action, and I don't know where the enemy is. The IX. Corps on my left is losing ground; on my right the XI. Corps has dissolved. I am marching in battle formation, ready to join issue at any point."

"The general situation is therefore excellent." The particular situation of the Ninth Army was so far from being excellent that many of those who read the message must have doubted its truth. They were now to have the best possible confirmation of it. Suddenly—it seemed little short of a miracle to the rank and file—it was found that the Germans were going. The X. Corps pressed forward and was in Bannay by sundown. At Mondement Château, after a final bombardment, the rear guard was chased out, leaving half-empty champagne glasses on the dining-room table. Everywhere the troops found that they could make progress. The projected counter-attack on Fère-Champenoise was not needed, and the 42nd Division, after its great march, hardly came into action that night. The struggle was over.

"To-morrow, general offensive all along the line!" proclaimed Foch. Then he sent out orders for the 10th to each executant, adding with his own hand the Napoleonic "Speed! Speed!" in every case. The speed he demanded was not forthcoming. The men were bone tired, and the horses equally so. In the afternoon German rear guards showed obstinacy, and there was often sharp fighting before they were dislodged. Yet progress was made. Lenharrée was regained, and on the left the X. Corps reached Vertus, covering over twelve miles. Many prisoners were taken, though they were for the most part stragglers, dropping from fatigue or reeling after visits to the cellars of Champagne.

"March again at five o'clock on the 11th," went the orders. "Outflank and envelop the rear guards; employ open formations; let each column help its neighbour. Objective, the Marne, right on Châlons, left on Epernay." This was, General Weygand has told us, the first of the only two entirely sleepless nights spent by Foch throughout the war. He stayed up in his eagerness to learn that the Marne bridges were free. The other night was the eve of the Armistice.

Again furious urging; again progress slower than the Army Commander hoped for. Still, the Marne was reached and a number of bridges were seized intact, sure proof of the haste of the retreat. The river was crossed south-east of Châlons, and Epernay was regained.

It was not mere physical fatigue which caused all the delay. There was also a moral reaction among commanders, who could hardly believe in their good fortune, and instinctively feared a trap. Indeed, the troops were often more eager to advance than were their leaders. Foch, always generous in his appreciation of the efforts of his subordinates, used to rage over this in

after years. He told Commandant Bugnet how he found his cavalry commander held up at a bridge over the Marne. "What, are you still here? You have not advanced? No, I don't ask you to charge. You've got artillery. Why not use it?" The unfortunate made excuses, but was finally, as the British have it, "given his bowler hat". "Off you go! We shall never get on together!" Another commander halted outside Châlons that night while the Crown Prince of Saxony was drinking champagne at the Hôtel Haute-Mère-Dieu. "He might have wiped out the lot."

This caution was everywhere apparent in the pursuit, and the British, who were in the lead, were by no means free from it.

On the 12th the X. Corps was handed back to General d'Espérey. The day was largely occupied by the passage of the Marne, and only nine miles were covered even by the centre, which had been hanging back. Hopes of putting the cavalry on the flanks of the retreating German columns were fading, and it was a stern chase. Foch himself entered Châlons, and dined at the Hôtel Haute-Mère-Dieu, but, unlike the Saxon notabilities, from army rations; for the enemy had gutted the town. There, too, General Sarraill, commanding the Third Army, came to break the news of the death of his son Germain, and to inform him that his son-in-law, Captain Bécourt, missing on the same day, had almost certainly also been killed. He asked to be left alone for a few minutes, then threw himself into his work again. There was no time for mourning.

After the war the marshal used to journey each year from Brittany in order to kneel in front of the memorial on the anniversary of his son's death. Then he would drive on, saying to the chauffeur: "Stop at the lane to

Mercy-le-Haut." Another descent from the car, and a walk across country to a hedge. "This is where Bécourt was killed." Otherwise, few ever heard him speak of either.

On the morning of the 13th the cavalry—there was now a corps of two divisions at the disposal of the Ninth Army—found the Suippes held by the enemy. Trenches were observed beyond the Roman Road which ran east and west across the *Champagne Pouilleuse*, "lousy Champagne". Was it but another rear guard? That could only be found out by attacking, and the orders of Joffre were on an ambitious scale.

Reality proved far different. The Ninth Army accomplished nothing except the capture of Souain by the XXI. Corps, now under the orders of Foch, and was unable anywhere else to advance beyond the Reims—Sainte-Menchoulde road throughout the 14th and 15th. It was more than a rear guard, and the pursuit was, in fact, at an end. The chalk downs of Champagne Pouilleuse were to be reserved for a great operation in 1915. The craggy, wooded heights farther west, the "Monts de Champagne", were to look down upon the French armies for years to come.

Naturally, this situation was not easily accepted. On the 16th and 17th efforts were made to capture the Moronvilliers massif, but they were met by tremendous fire, including that of heavy batteries beyond range of anything the French had available to oppose them, and were unsuccessful. It would require heavy artillery to pulverize the entrenchments, and of that there was as yet little. There was none too much field-artillery ammunition.

A little more progress was made here and there; in fact, a mile and a half on a front of about four miles in

a series of operations directly east of Reims. A heavy German counter-offensive was held up on the 26th, and next day any ground still in the enemy's possession was recovered. Then affairs quietened down. That they did was fortunate for the Ninth Army, now seriously short of shell and stripped of troops withdrawn by Joffre to take part in the so-called "Race to the Sea". By October those conditions of trench warfare which were to become so familiar, but at the time appeared to represent only a passing phase, had set in.

This was a quiet place, and therefore no place for Foch. On the afternoon of the 4th he was summoned to the Grand-Quartier-Général at Romilly-sur-Seine and ordered to take over another task.

CHAPTER IX

FLANDERS, 1914

WHILE the flame of battle was dying down in Champagne, it was travelling northward into country hitherto unscorched by warfare. The Germans had everywhere been fought to a standstill or driven back; but they had, from Alsace to the Oise, blocked any further frontal advance by the French. It was natural that each should now extend to the north in an endeavour to envelop the adversary's open flank. This was not at first a "Race to the Sea", and Foch always disliked the phrase. At this moment probably the only commander thinking of the sea was Field-Marshal Sir John French, whose eyes were on the Channel ports. In sector after sector, ever farther north, the two sides clashed and fought fiercely for a few days without definite result. Finally, seeing the new front on the point of solidifying also, their last chance of manœuvre—perhaps their last chance of winning the war—slipping away, the Germans launched the desperate offensive known as the Battles of the Yser and of Ypres.

At Romilly Foch learnt that the Second Army from Lorraine had come up on the left of the Sixth; that the Tenth was forming on its left between the Scarpe and the Lys; and that the British were moving from the Aisne to come into line still farther north. The Belgian Army lay about Antwerp, which still held out. He was given command of the French left wing with the title

of Assistant (Adjoint) to the Commander-in-Chief. His relations with the Allies were undefined; they depended upon his own personality and the resources in troops which Joffre could spare him.

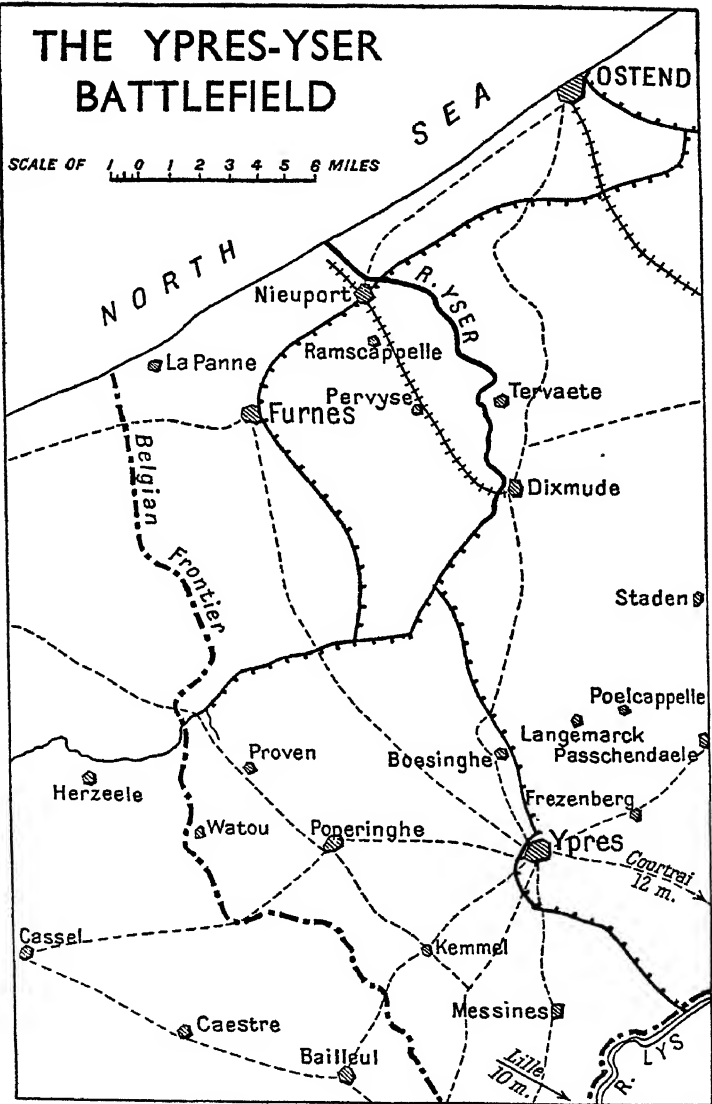
This promotion, almost without precedent in rapidity as it was—it involved, for example, issuing orders to the Second Army Commander, from whom Foch had been receiving orders thirty-seven days before—needs some explanation. The qualities of character and mind which Foch had displayed in his two commands had, indeed, not failed to make a deep impression upon Joffre. Yet there was more than this. There was also on the part of the Commander-in-Chief a confidence in the loyalty of Foch which he did not feel in the same degree regarding all his chief subordinates. He was putting his “Adjoint” into a delicate as well as a responsible post, and it was a relief to his mind to know that double-dealing was an impossibility while Foch held it. Also, though Foch, with his hasty tongue, was not picked as a model of tact, he was not lacking in that quality. He possessed what is even more valuable when dealing with soldiers, who are apt to be suspicious of a too tender regard for their feelings, the candour of the open-hearted man. No more than intrigue, would there be “incidents” with allies.

No one wasted less time than Foch in taking over such a mission. Though he had not reached Romilly till 4 p.m. on 4th October, he left his headquarters at Châlons at 10 p.m., and drove through the night over bad roads and bridges temporarily repaired to Breteuil. He arrived at 4.30 a.m. on the 5th, and lay down on a school bench while General de Castelnau was dressing.

Castelnau was having a bad time and was perhaps growing too much accustomed to withdrawing behind rivers.

THE YPRES-YSER BATTLEFIELD

SCALE OF 1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 MILES



He now stated that he must bring his hard-pressed right behind the Somme. This would never do. Its effect on the projects of Joffre would be like building a tower and, just as it was nearing completion, taking out a section of the centre. Foch forbade the step. He then drove on to Aubigny, in time to meet General de Maud'huy, commanding the Tenth Army, at an early breakfast. He had to pay Castelnau two more lightning visits, during the second of which he arranged that Allenby's Cavalry Corps, now marching north across the zone of the Second Army, should support it in case of need. Once, however, the resolute Duchêne, formerly right-hand man to Foch in the XX. Corps, had been brought in by him as Chief of the Staff to the Second Army, talk of withdrawal ceased. This front became stabilized, and then passed from the command of Foch. In all, he had covered 530 miles in 57 hours, and that mostly at a slow pace, along roads crowded with advancing troops and transport, and with refugees fleeing before the enemy.

On 9th October the Germans entered Antwerp. The Belgian Field Army, wearied and demoralized by loss and privations, was retreating westward in the hope of reaching France. Its columns were covered to the east by British troops, the 3rd Cavalry and 7th Divisions recently landed at Ostend and Zeebrugge, and a French Marine Brigade. There was no close pursuit, fortunately; for little fight was left in the Belgians.

Foch had been in consultation with Sir John French, an acquaintance of long standing, and had found him as eager as he was himself to act against the German right. The British Army was about to arrive between La Bassée and Ypres. Foch, not yet realizing the state of the Belgians, was hopeful that they would participate

in a Franco-British offensive in the direction of Lille and Courtrai. Invaluable as had been the services of the Belgian Army, at this moment the reinforcement which it represented did not, unfortunately, balance in quality the hostile force which followed on its heels, that German army which had been investing Antwerp.

It had been proposed that the Belgian Army should be taken out of the firing-line for reorganization. King Albert's assent had been unwilling, and immediately afterwards he had decided to make a last stand with his broken troops behind the barrier of the Yser, in the hope of saving the last corner of Belgium. He therefore needed no urging from Foch on that score, and Foch was to some extent misinformed as to the effect of the visit which he paid to the King at Furnes on 16th October. And yet, who shall say that the words he spoke on that occasion, wounding as they were and deeply embarrassed as he was in addressing them to this warrior-saint, were without effect? The King was alone in his determination to stand, and it was urgent that he should be upheld. How little the Belgian staff believed in the project was clear when Foch regained his headquarters at Doullens and found that Weygand had been requested to prepare quarters for the whole Belgian Army at Calais.

Foch had placed the Marine Brigade in Dixmude to form a buttress in the new front and bidden its commander, Admiral Ronarc'h, hold out at all costs. South of that point there was a gap which he had only Territorials to fill until French reinforcements and the British I. Corps arrived. Still, he felt more comfortable in mind, and said so in a letter written late that night to Joffre. He added, however, the prophetic postscript:

"All the same, when you have some troops of good

quality to put on the Belgian left they will be well placed from every point of view."

Leaving out of account the less vital struggle at La Bassée, the rest of the year's operations in the north may be divided into two battles, overlapping in time and adjacent in space, but differing in their characteristics. They are the Battle of the Yser, from the 18th October to the 1st November, and the Battle of Ypres from the 21st October to the 12th November.

The Yser front was flat as the back of one's hand, water-logged, largely reclaimed from the sea. The sluggish stream, tidal up to Dixmude, was but a slight obstacle, and there was no other.

On the 18th the German advanced guards came on with confidence, but made little progress. A desperate struggle reached its maximum intensity by the 21st, on which day it spread momentarily to the front of the French Territorials south of Dixmude. Again and again German assaults were beaten back. Under the inspiration of their King the Belgians put up a stubborn resistance in a conflict fought in ghastly conditions, the men being in many cases so coated in blue clay that they were hardly recognizable as human. The results of the fighting so far were that the Germans had failed but that the Belgians had put in all their reserves and were utterly worn out.

Fortunately, the French 42nd Division now arrived and could be placed on the Belgian left at Nieuport. Joffre had pondered that postscript and had certainly fulfilled the desire of Foch that the reinforcements should be of good quality. The latter was delighted to see the 42nd and its bulky commander again.

It was needed. On the 22nd, after heavy fighting, the Germans established a bridgehead over the Yser at

Tervaete. By the evening of the 24th they were across the river on the whole front between Dixmude and Nieuport, where the Marines on one flank and the 42nd Division on the other still stood like doorposts.

We have said there was no other line. Well, there is always something, and here there was the Dixmude-Nieuport railway, which at least could not be missed by retreating infantry. Foch, after a stormy interview with the Belgian Chief of the Staff ("I am not in a position to command reinforcements; you have held on for a week and you will hold on for another"), agreed to place a brigade of the 42nd in the centre, though this compelled Grossetti to abandon an offensive project at Nieuport. The Belgians had already decided to open the sluices and let in the sea. It was estimated that if the culverts under the railway embankment, which was from three to five feet high, were first blocked, the water could be made to lap the embankment without passing it. There were anxious moments yet. The sea came in but slowly. The Germans smashed their way into the Belgian line at Ramscappelle and reached firm ground beyond the inundations. This serious threat was promptly answered by Grossetti, who threw them back by a counter-attack. It was their last chance. A silent, slow-moving, but irresistible ally, the water, came to the aid of the Belgians, and before it the Germans had to draw back. Anxiety for the Yser line was set at rest.

The battle was less spectacular and bloody than that farther south, but no less vital. Calais might well have been lost had the line broken; nothing could have saved Dunkirk.

If ever the offensive spirit of Foch betrayed him, it might be said to have done so at the outset of the Battle of Ypres. The strength of the defensive had been proved

everywhere; here was surely an opportunity to let the enemy batter himself against it, to let him come on and be shot down.

The situation was not so simple as that, apart from the fact that Foch was not a free agent and that Joffre and French were equally responsible for the offensive. At the opening of the battle there appeared to be a gap in the enemy's array north of the Lys and a possibility of recovering the great industrial towns, which would have been of priceless value. The temptation to try his fortune in this, the last zone of manœuvre left open, was one that no commander could have resisted. The effect of the German howitzer fire was such as to make the prospect of stationary warfare forbidding, and it seemed only reasonable to make one more bid for victory in the open. Finally, since the Battles of the Frontiers, the troops had been practically without tools, so could not in any case adequately entrench themselves.

It was a battle both confused and terrible. When the two sides first engaged they were represented largely by cavalry, French, British and German, which had naturally led the race of extending flanks; in fact, at this stage the only Allied infantry on the main battlefield was General Sir Douglas Haig's I. Corps and the 7th Division. As reinforcements arrived, there were constant changes in dispositions. The Allied troops were sorted out into two zones, the British south of the Menin road; but there was remingling because the French had on occasion to support them. By the time the struggle was over the French had engaged four corps, the British two, and the Germans eight, not counting fractions of other formations, cavalry and independent units on both sides.

Foch had moved his headquarters to Cassel, perched atop of the last of that line of hills which, beginning with the Messines Ridge, dominates the Flanders plain. The sleepy, isolated little town will always be associated with him. Down its steep road he drove daily to call at one headquarters after another, driving back in the evening at his usual terrific pace in order to read the day's reports from the line and take action upon them. From its eminence he could see the smoke clouds that hung over Ypres. He is commemorated there by the mounted figure which gazes calmly and steadily out over the plain. A replica of this statue in London reminds us of what we owe to him.¹

As French troops, eventually to include the IX. Corps which had fought under his orders at the Marne and the XX. which he had commanded at Morhange, arrived, Foch formed a new army, the Eighth, under General d'Urbal. He began to display a characteristic which was to cause terrible losses and fatigue to many a fine unit but was, on the other hand, probably an important factor in the winning of the war: an extreme parsimony in doling out the reserves at his disposal. It used to be said in jest that an army had to suffer annihilation before Foch would send a division to support it, and that then the division would have orders to recapture all the lost ground. As a fact, his handling of reserves amounted to genius—it was his greatest contribution to the cause in his first two months as Generalissimo—and he made remarkably accurate estimates as to which threats could be parried without

¹ The Londoner who travels daily from Victoria Station to Whitehall sees daily a contrast calculated to break the heart of any horseman, any soldier, and especially any British horseman or soldier. And yet, our Commander-in-Chief, too, had a good seat on a horse and rode fine blood horses. But posterity will never believe this.

them, and what strength would be required to meet those that could not. The eager, high-strung man, continually lighting cigars which promptly went out, hurrying from point to point, ever calling for precise information and storming if he were proffered generalities, was the ideal co-ordinator of resources and of effort.

The first stage of the battle was one of encounter, both sides attempting to advance. By the 22nd October the British round Ypres had been thrown on the defensive. The French persisted for over a week longer in their efforts, but with limited success. Between the 26th and the 28th their IX. Corps, in co-operation with the British left, made some progress astride the Ypres-Roulers railway, but there was little else to show. Then deadlock ensued, followed by a period of German initiative. In all this later period the Germans gained but one really important success, and that south of the main battlefield, when they captured the Messines Ridge. Their efforts were next concentrated south of the Ypres-Roulers railway, and these culminated on 11th November in a terrific attack from Messines to Polygon Wood. On the greater part of this front the assault was bloodily repulsed. Where it did make progress, the enemy was apparently unaware how grievously reduced were the gallant British troops opposed to him, and made little attempt to pursue his advantage. On 15th November the French began the relief of the British I. Corps in front of Ypres. The Germans were now quiet, except as regards their artillery, which showered incendiary shells upon the Cloth Hall of Ypres—sure sign that the enemy had been balked. He had been fought to a standstill in the West and was sending troops to the East, to prop up his failing Austrian ally.

In few battles fought by allies speaking different languages and using different methods has a warmer spirit of comradeship prevailed than in the First Battle of Ypres. It is well to remember this, because Foch, for various reasons, was not equally successful in promoting such a spirit in the Second Battle or in the Battle of the Somme. Each ally supported and reinforced the other loyally, and in this respect the British have specially good reason to remember their neighbour, General Dubois, commanding the IX. Corps. The Germans, with considerable superiority of numbers and many fresh formations at their disposal, with a great superiority in artillery, had failed.

Thus open warfare came to an end on the Western Front. As Foch looked at it, the Allies had been compelled to abandon the initiative they had gained on the Marne for want of armament equal to that of the enemy. They were eventually to catch up in that respect, but by then field fortification, backed by the machine-gun, had given the defence so great an advantage over the attack that the whole nature of warfare seemed to be changed. That this was so Foch would never admit. Taking the long view, as might be expected of a military philosopher, he treated this phase as one of helplessness, a breakdown in military inventiveness and resource.

On 2nd December at Saint-Omer, King George V. bestowed on Foch the Grand Cross of the Bath, the highest of British military honours. But first he spoke to him in private, thanking him for his services to the British Army. For the King and our country as well as for his own, Foch had been a faithful Warden of the Channel Ports.

At the end of December he wrote to Madame Bienvenüe, his wife's aunt, a letter of new-year wishes

containing a vivid summary of recent experiences and inspired by both clear-sightedness and humour. Ypres and the Yser, he said, were not decisive victories but represented very sharp checks to the Germans. The British and Belgians, he remarked, obeyed him when they were in so much trouble that they had to. He was never to find himself in unquestioned command of Allied troops; but in 1914 and 1918, if not always in 1915 and 1916, he contrived to get what he wanted.

CHAPTER X

YEAR OF EXPERIMENT

ON a frontage of 400 miles, from Switzerland to the Channel, the opposing armies had gone to ground. That winter saw them begin, rather tentatively and clumsily on both sides but especially so on that of the Allies, to borrow methods, weapons and even habits of life from warfare of a distant past. The equivalents of the old bastion, curtain and half-moon were developed. Resort was had to mining with the object of blowing up a work which appeared otherwise impregnable. Every man had his post, and reliefs soon became as regular as the clock. There appeared gradually the hand grenade, trench artillery, the mace for fighting too close for the bayonet. There were experiments with body-armour.

No one realized that this, with an infinite number of complications added as a result of experience, was to remain the prevalent state of affairs for years to come, or that when active operations intervened even a highly successful offensive might gain no more ground than the infantryman could overlook if he put his head over the parapet. At this moment Foch in his studies spoke of Antwerp, Brussels and Namur. His thought had wandered up into the clouds. Action brought it back again very quickly, and he was soon to become the pioneer in adapting himself to changed circumstances. Everyone at this time had large ideas. Their translation into reality was pathetic: two or three little offensive

actions north of Arras, near Ypres, and on the coast, which had only a trifling measure of success. Foch did not consider that the time for them was ripe, and they were not made at his instigation.

Plans for operations of very different scope were in preparation. They were based upon a weakness in the German system of communications created by the huge parallelogram of the Ardennes, an area of steep ridges and deep-cut, twisting valleys, heavily wooded and nearly 500 square miles in extent, which lay behind the enemy's centre. Through the Ardennes there was only one double-line railway, and it was of very limited capacity. South of them there was another of far greater importance, from Thionville through Mezières to Hirson, where it linked with the main system in Belgium. This was invaluable, but did not fully suffice to serve the eastern half of the German front. The rest of that front, from Reims to the Channel, depended upon a series of lines which crossed the Rhine and passed through a bottle-neck between the Ardennes and Dutch Limburg. Railways, and main roads also, radiated out in the great Douai plain. The vulnerable junctions were Saint-Quentin, Cambrai, Valenciennes, Aulnoye and Douai. Hirson was also of the highest importance, but less accessible. Successful thrusts at these centres of communication would lead to the disintegration of the German front. But to cause a collapse, to make it impossible for the enemy to go on fighting in France and Belgium, they needed to be made with the speed attained in 1918, so that the German right wing would have to retreat hastily in order to avoid seeing its communications cut behind it.

There were three possible lines of operation: from the Artois plateau eastward against the centres of

communication west of Reims; from Reims northward against the Thionville-Mezières-Hirson line, and thence perhaps against the Liège-Namur line, the chief of the northern system; and from Verdun northward against the Thionville-Hirson line close to the Rhine crossing. General Joffre decided to exploit the first two, keeping the third for use if the Germans began to waver.

Such in essence were the plans for 1915. If they were far from being fulfilled, they were yet similar in broad lines to that of Foch and Haig in 1918, which brought decisive victory. The amateur and the theorist often make too much of strategy and are carried away by its scope and sweep. Strategy is, in fact, simple to the trained mind; it is generally a choice between following one obvious course or choosing between two or three alternatives. Tactics, weapons, and supply are the master-keys which alone can open the door to strategy. Foch was one of those who best realized this, but he who realized it best of all was not to return to the West for another eighteen months. His name was Ludendorff. The difference between them was that Foch, the strategist, developed a sense of tactics, while Ludendorff, a very great tactician, was always a weak strategist.

The Allies started at a disadvantage, because they had dispersed their effort by instituting the Gallipoli campaign. That was probably correct strategy, but, if so, the British Army, which was chiefly responsible for the campaign in the Near East, should have closed down its efforts temporarily in the West. Neither trained man-power nor weapons sufficed for both. On the other hand, the Germans had despatched forces from the West and others formed at home to the Russian front; many parts of their line in France were lightly held, and they had few reserves.

Joffre decided to begin operations against the road-and-rail network in the Douai plain by the capture of Vimy Ridge and the foothills of the Artois plateau. He wished the British simultaneously to seize Aubers Ridge, farther north. Unfortunately, he required that the French Eighth Army, which had taken over the whole Ypres Salient, should first be relieved by the British. Sir John French did not consider that he would have sufficient resources to capture Aubers Ridge after the relief. He therefore decided to strike first independently; next, the British would take over the Ypres Salient; and, finally, the British would support the French offensive by operations on a reduced scale.

The upshot was the Battle of Neuve Chapelle, begun on 10th March. At the end of that day 4000 yards of the German front had been captured, to a maximum depth of 1200 yards. Hesitations and delays, the stout resistance of parties of Germans, the "friction" of battle—far greater now than when Clausewitz described it as a predominating factor—and lack of munitions soon brought the advance, and the engagement itself, to an end; but a great German counter-attack was smashed, and the losses were almost exactly equal on both sides. The French Staffs, who had looked upon the British as primarily good defensive troops, were impressed. Taking into account lack of experience in new conditions, Neuve Chapelle seemed promising. After the battle the British took over the Ypres Salient, the French maintaining only a detachment of one Colonial and one Territorial division from east of Lange-marck to the canal at Steenstraet, now the Belgian right.

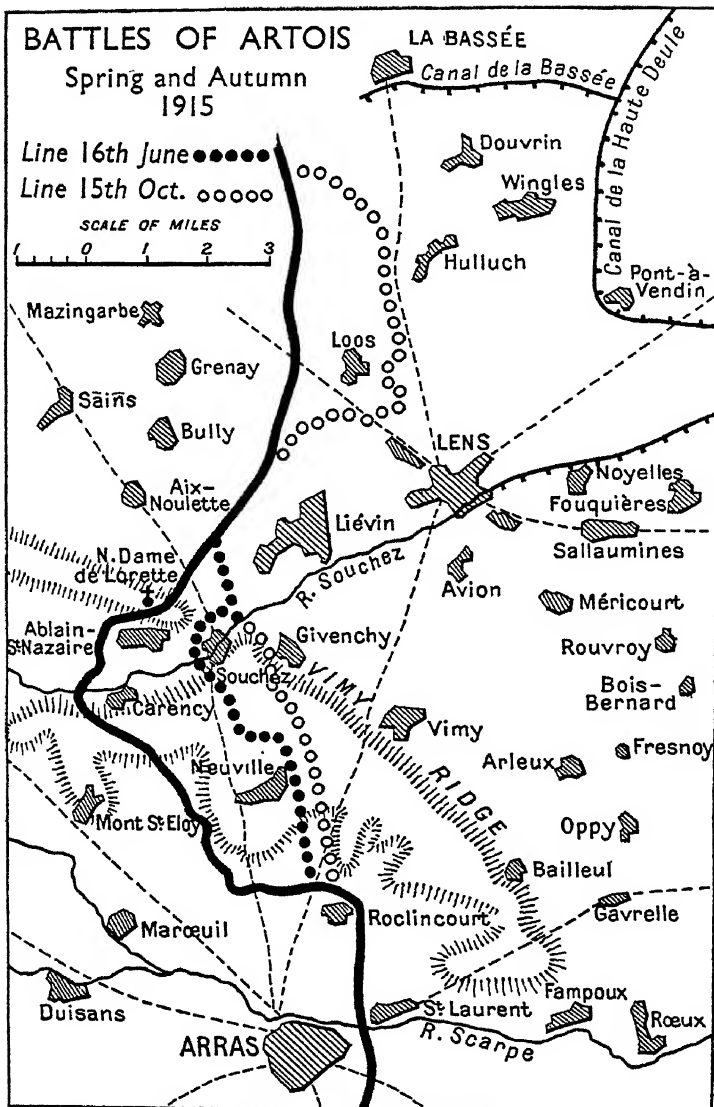
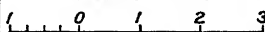
Foch had been since 5th January commander of the Groupe d'Armées du Nord,¹ a title which made no

¹ Henceforth described by the letters G.A.N.

Spring and Autumn
1915

Line 15th Oct. ○○○○○

SCALE OF MILES



difference to his functions. If anything, indeed, he had less direct touch with the British than in 1914. Their force was no longer so small that he could, as it were, take it under his wing, and besides, Joffre had more leisure to deal with their affairs in person.

The Salient was fairly quiet except for fierce local fighting at its southern shoulder, where a mound known as Hill 60 was captured by the British on 17th April. Ypres was, however, heavily bombarded, a matter of some significance, as it suggested an attempt to block the roads radiating from it. There had also been hints that the Germans were about to use a new weapon, "poison gas", contrary to the laws of war. Yet these pointers did not lessen the effect of the surprise on that fatal sunny evening of 22nd April, when the chlorine cylinders were opened and there was introduced into warfare a new horror, the known effects and still more the potentialities of which have ever since perplexed and terrified the world.

At 5.30 p.m. a heavy-artillery bombardment began. A few minutes later it was noted that a curious grey-green cloud overhung the French lines. A little later still thousands of terrified Zouaves, Algerian Tirailleurs, and middle-aged Territorials poured back to and over the Ypres Canal. The white men's faces were as dark as those of the Africans. They coughed and vomited. Some dropped in their tracks and died. Interrogated, they pointed first over their shoulders, then to their mouths, and uttered the word, "Gaz!" Some, thinking of their country rather than of their own plight, cried, "Pauvre France!"

A line was formed on the canal, but from thence to the British left there was a breach of over three and a half miles. Surprised by the extent of their own success

and hindered by their own gas, the Germans did not seriously press the unsteady front on the canal. Local counter-attacks by the Canadians on the British left failed owing to lack of French co-operation; but before daylight some ten battalions were strung out across the breach.

During the night Foch ordered the commander of the French detachment to hold fast to the line now occupied and to prepare to carry out a counter-attack. For this purpose he directed the Tenth Army to send up a division post-haste. Unfortunately, the left of this army was nearly thirty miles as the crow flies from the battlefield. Next morning he was visited by Sir John French, who agreed to help in counter-attacks to restore the situation but stipulated that if this could not be effected quickly the British should withdraw from their untenable position.

On the 23rd the British counter-attacked with all their might; again the French, who had lost a considerable number of batteries, could not assist. Even when French reinforcements had arrived almost the whole weight of this terrible battle fell upon the out-gunned British.

The latter's complaint was not on this score, but at being asked to participate in combined operations and then left to act alone. It was also unfortunate that, on the earnest plea of Foch, they twice postponed withdrawal, to no end but the piling up of losses. Foch was not here altogether at his best. Admittedly, he was not well served. The gruff but soldierly giant d'Urbal was gone, and the present French commander was not of the same calibre. Afraid to resist Foch when the latter demanded too much, he was at the same time afraid to carry out his orders. Foch had a very

proper appreciation of the unfortunate effects which would follow the abandonment of the Broodseinde Ridge, and his prophecies on that score were fully borne out. Yet he took long to realize that the French were incapable of fulfilling their rôle and, that being so, that the present British position, terrifically bombarded and constantly threatened by gas, was untenable. Finally, after repeated fruitless counter-strokes, Sir John French insisted. The withdrawal to Frezenberg, interrupted by another discharge of gas, was effected between 1st and 3rd May. The attacks lasted another three weeks, and Frezenberg was lost before they ceased.

Meanwhile preparations for the Artois offensive had continued. They were checked in detail by Foch, who quitted Cassel for the Château de Bryas, near Saint-Pol. On 9th May, after a long and intense artillery preparation, the French advanced to the assault on a front of twelve miles from north-east of Arras to west of Loos. On the same day the British right made another unsuccessful attack on Aubers Ridge, and then had to break off the action, largely owing to shortage of ammunition.

The French Tenth Army under d'Urbal began magnificently in the centre. It sheared its way clean through the defences and captured the highest point on Vimy Ridge, a penetration of three and a half miles. Elements are even believed to have reached Petit Vimy, on the eastern side in the plain, a distance of five miles. The enemy was in confusion and had lost 6000 prisoners. It was a great achievement, because the position was not only one of great natural strength but also fortified with a skill and industry probably unmatched at that date. The old system of a front and a

support line had given place to a maze of entrenchments, peppered with strong points, defended by machine-guns the detachments of which were sheltered in caves hollowed out of the chalk.

Unhappily, progress on the flanks was utterly insufficient, and the reserves to exploit the victory were late—how often was that tale to be recounted! The gallant Tirailleurs and Legionaries on the crest were driven off it.

The battle on the uplands then resolved itself into a series of fierce combats for the reduction of fortress-villages and field works. Carency was stormed on the 12th; Ablains-Saint-Nazaire was completely cleared on the 27th. The strongest of all, Neuville Saint-Vaast, did not fall until 9th June. The very names conjure up memories of some of the bloodiest fighting of the war. The British intervened again north of the La Bassée Canal on 16th May, and for ten days of the Battle of Festubert battered the German front with dogged courage, but achieved comparatively small gains at the cost of heavy casualties. Joffre had constantly urged Foch to resume the attack on a grand scale, but he was unable to do so until 16th June. Again a detachment penetrated to the summit, and again it was forced back. This time the net result was meagre. Then the operation was broken off by order of Joffre.

The French troops had never fought better, and, despite their heavy losses, the possibility of penetrating an organized front dissipated the depression which had appeared when siege warfare set in and it began to seem that the war would be eternal. The battle was also a triumph for the French munition factories; for a country which could not compare with Germany as regards industrialization and had lost a large proportion of its

factories and mines had begun to make up leeway at a wonderful rate. On the other hand, the very hard-won gains on a six-mile front seldom extended to more than two miles in depth and had only a limited strategic significance. The Germans still held the highest ground defending the mining basin of Lens.

Joffre had now determined to postpone his attack in Champagne and carry it out on a greater scale than previously contemplated, at the same time renewing the offensive in Artois. Though the Russians were in sore trouble, he refused to be hurried. Meanwhile in the East the Germans were fighting their way towards the Pripet marshes, to Vilna, and Dvinsk; and amid the rocky steeps and gullies of the Gallipoli Peninsula British and Australians and French were struggling to open the gateway of the Dardanelles.

What he had seen in Artois had been deeply pondered by Foch. He made some strong comments on the mis-handling of reserves in the course of the battle. But he went far deeper than that. He had begun seriously to doubt, in the present circumstances, the expediency of risking all on the hope of a break-through, such as Joffre contemplated in Champagne. He would have preferred to make certain of capturing Vimy Ridge in the autumn by relegating Champagne to a secondary position. He strove hard to persuade Joffre to limit objectives. He had not, however, the final word, though Joffre always gave heed to his advice. Moreover, the arguments of Foch were not at this stage conclusive. Doubtless a break-through, in the sense that the assailant finds himself in the open with no hostile troops barring his way, was impossible in France, though it was effected in Palestine. Yet a rupture of the hostile front, followed by a series of advances which the defender is unable to bring to a

halt, was all but achieved by the Germans in early 1918 on at least three occasions, and was fully achieved by the Allies later in the year. Foch did not as yet distinguish clearly between a success of this sort and a veritable break-through. On the other hand, the "conquest of certain important points" of which Foch spoke was not very much less costly than an attack *à fond*, and proved to be productive of far less advantage than was expected. Commanding ground had, generally speaking, only a limited value when it formed part of an inactive front, valuable as it was in the course of a battle.

The greatest of the Allied offensives since the stabilization of the front was launched on 25th September. The major effort was that in Champagne, where the Group of Armies of General de Castelnau attacked on a frontage of fifteen miles east of the Suippes at Aubérive, after such a bombardment as had never yet been witnessed. Here the initial success of the Fourth Army of de Langle and the left of Pétain's Second Army was prodigious; it was, indeed, something very near to the illusive break-through. Yet again, though the French took 18,000 prisoners and many guns, though the German front was shaken to its foundations and at one moment only the insistence of Falkenhayn prevented a precipitate retreat, the usual deadlock soon supervened.

The Artois offensive was also on a wide front. The steadily growing British Army had relieved the French south of the La Bassée Canal and was co-operating by an attack between it and the northern suburbs of Lens. This time, in fact, the British rôle was the more spectacular. Loos was taken; the attack flowed up the slopes beyond and crossed the La Bassée-Lens road. Some troops penetrated a distance of three miles,

though they could not hold their ground. The operation was, from the British point of view, premature; resources were still scarcely adequate for a venture on so large a scale. Yet, even allowing for this handicap, there was matter for grave disappointment. The reserves were mismanaged and administrative arrangements, generally good with the methodical British, broke down at one stage. The Battle of Loos, in fact, brought about, or at least precipitated, a change in the command of the British armies.

The French attack achieved similar results without ever showing quite so much promise. Souchez, for which there had been hard fighting in the spring, was captured, and good progress was made up the slopes of Vimy Ridge. At one point the crest was reached and held for the duration of the battle, though it was afterwards lost. Strong German counter-attacks were defeated. In view of the brilliant early success in Champagne, Joffre decided, against the view of Foch, to limit the operation in Artois and to ration the ammunition allotted to Foch to the profit of Castelnau. Foch was also obliged to use the IX. Corps, which had failed south of Arras, to relieve the British between the original French left and Loos. In these circumstances his efforts hung fire. There was every intention of renewing the advance, but the opening up of yet another theatre of war, that of Macedonia, with its call not only for troops and munitions but also for the rearward services of a modern army, caused the project to be abandoned.

Foch was clearer in his own mind now as to the nature of the warfare in France. In a long report to Joffre he began with the material side. The output of heavy-artillery ammunition must be largely increased;

none of the offensives of 1915 had been adequately supported in this respect. Trench artillery, which could to a great extent take over the functions of field and heavy at short ranges, must be developed and made more mobile, with properly trained personnel. Gas, the weapon introduced by the Germans, must be used against them, with more effect than hitherto, this being the business of the laboratories even more than of the factories. Everything possible must be done to spare the infantry, in order to enable it to endure the inevitably lengthy fighting for positions fortified in depth. "After artillery, let us summon chemistry to our aid. And do not let us wait a year to have its products in our hands."

Then he turned to strategy and tactics. He had now fully gripped the distinction between the breakthrough pure and simple and the continuous advance effected by means of successive efforts which disintegrated the hostile front. More definitely than in the spring he condemned the former conception.

"The succession of objectives which the offensive encounters in its progress inevitably requires a succession of attacks. . . . In place of a violent shock action lasting a short time, we should have recourse to a continuous action, a series of efforts, of course succeeding each other with the least possible delay. . . . We must give up the headlong onslaught, in masses more or less deep and dense, with the reserves on the heels of the leading line, ready to capture several successive obstacles in one bound and to press on till it breaks through. It has never succeeded. . . . In fact, the infantry attack fails or halts where the preparation is found insufficient."

Even after the amazing successes of the Germans

in the course of one day during their offensives of 1918, even when later on all was going so well with his own offensives that any risk seemed justifiable, Foch never lost sight of these principles.

CHAPTER XI

YEAR OF THE SOMME

AT the opening of 1916 the prime factor was the expansion of the British armies. Divisions of the Territorial Army and of the New Armies formed by Lord Kitchener had already taken part in major operations; now the time was coming when the young citizen forces of Britain were to intervene in the struggle on a great scale. France looked to Britain to assume a greater share of the burden, and Britain was willing to do so.

The British front ran from Boesinghe, north of Ypres, to Loos; between Loos and Ransart, a distance of nearly twenty miles, the French Tenth Army intervened, and the British line then continued to the Somme.

Long discussions took place between General Joffre and the new British Commander-in-Chief, General Sir Douglas Haig, on the subject of the great offensive which both were agreed should be carried out that year, to be supported by one of similar scope in Russia and another more limited in Italy. Finally it was arranged that the attack should be launched on a frontage of thirty miles astride the Somme, the general objective being the Ham-Péronne-Bapaume road. Foch, in his capacity of commander of the G.A.N., was to direct the French operations.

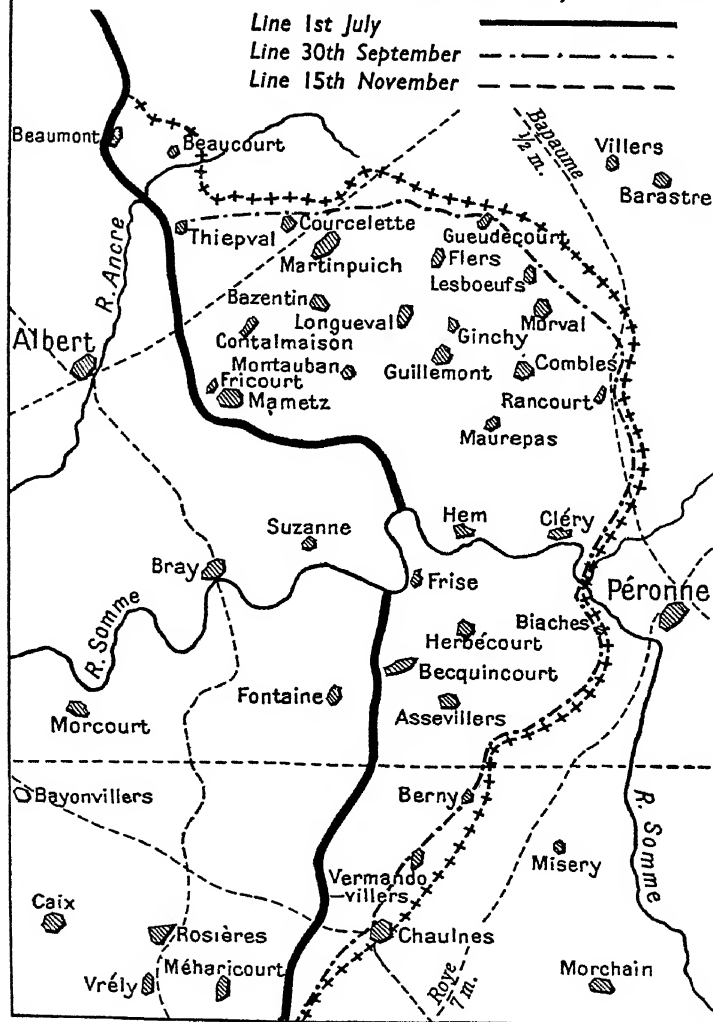
On 21st February General von Falkenhayn struck his first blow against the French at Verdun. The British thereupon relieved the French Tenth Army, thus

setting free French reserves, a more valuable service than the launching of improvised local attacks. Despite this aid, the drain of Verdun grew so heavy that the French share of the Somme offensive was cut down again and again, until it was finally reduced to three corps, which formed the Sixth Army under General Fayolle. The front was reduced to eight miles and the attack in the direction of Roye, on which Foch set much store, was abandoned. He was grievously disappointed; in fact, except as a means of easing the pressure at Verdun, the offensive now seemed to him almost profitless. Breadth, strength, and capacity for long duration were for him indispensable qualities in such an operation. Even before the final reduction he expressed a fear that after some tactical successes there would be a deadlock, which was as good as to say, losses and sacrifices without notable advantages. He made preparations for broadening the zone of attack to the southward if the necessary forces should be provided.

He came near to being prevented from taking part in the battle. In May his chauffeur, swerving to avoid a frightened horse, drove his car into a tree. Foch had his head driven through the glass; his son-in-law, Fournier, was less lucky and broke his nose against the frame of the door. Foch came out of hospital two days later with his head covered with bandages and his mouth so cut that he could scarcely eat.

Joffre, who had in the previous year aimed at such distant strategical goals, was now adopting the view of the offensive battle propounded by Foch. He was, in fact, going further than that; for he had chosen a battlefield which had little to recommend it beyond the fact that the junction of the French and British lay upon it. There was, even in the first instance, no really

BATTLE OF THE SOMME, 1916



SCALE OF 0 1 2 3 4 5 MILES

important strategic goal within reach, and one of the most considerable, Roye, was ruled out of account. The truth is that Joffre did not think that the inexperienced British troops could carry out a really powerful offensive except in close combination with the French, and he subordinated everything else to this consideration.

The Battle of the Somme is, indeed, almost as complicated as the Battle of the Marne, but for a very different reason. In its case the difficulty arises in following the ideas actuating the high command. Joffre was a convert to *la guerre d'usure*, the wearing-out battle. Haig started with a clear-cut plan: a breakthrough, a turn north-east, the bringing into action of his Third Army south of Arras, and the rolling up of the German line. When, however, he failed in his attempt to achieve this end, he went much further towards attrition pure and simple than either Foch or Joffre. They were prepared for fairly long pauses, if such pauses would serve for the mounting of broad attacks with comparatively deep objectives. Haig, on the other hand, took as his first principle that the enemy should be given no rest and that blow should follow blow with the shortest possible interval.

For Foch the artillery preparation was the measure of what was possible for the infantry. ("The depth of ground beaten by artillery determines the extent of the objectives that can be allotted to the infantry.") He, at all events, never banked upon a swift breakthrough. There must be methodical progress until the enemy's capacity for resistance had been broken by moral and material disorganization, the attacker striving the while by all the means in his power to preserve his own offensive capacity. Only when the enemy's reserves

had been used up and he no longer opposed to the attack an organized defence would it be possible to abandon these methodical methods.

It was by reason of this conception of the offensive that he felt so much anxiety as he saw the battle-front progressively narrowed. On a terrain such as that chosen by Joffre the chief aim must be the defeat of the enemy, almost without reference to other strategic advantages. The smaller the frontage, the less was the probability of such a result.

Again, while Haig's original scheme of turning north-east and rolling up the enemy's line might have paid if it could have been quickly effected, persistence in this aim after the battle had degenerated into a step-by-step advance was another matter. Now, it seemed to Foch, the effect was that the British were turning their backs upon the French. In the present circumstances he would have preferred an advance, if not due eastward, at least only slightly north of east. It seemed to him that this would bring to bear the greatest possible pressure upon the German system of defence. It was on this account that, rather against the view of Joffre, Foch persisted in attacks south of the Somme. The pity was that French resources were inadequate south of the river at the outset; for the opportunity was there, and we now know that the Germans were on the point of abandoning the whole great bend of the Somme.

Altogether, he had in these months perhaps the most difficult task of his life. He failed to give the battle the complexion he desired and even to maintain quite the old harmony with the British; but all the circumstances were against him.

The limitation of the French offensive proved even more unfortunate than he had expected. On 1st July

the only French corps north of the Somme, the XX.—his old command—took all its limited objectives. South of the river success was more easily won; in fact, the objectives were for the most part passed. Had the attack extended farther south, it would certainly have gone equally well, and then genuine exploitation might have taken place. As it was, the French force was at present little more than a flank guard—and to a force successful only where in touch with it; for on the whole front north of Albert the British failed.

The British Commander-in-Chief decided, after some hesitation, to limit his effort for the time being to the extension and exploitation of what success he had already gained. Joffre, and Foch with him, were eager that he should renew the attack on Thiepval and the high ground south of the Ancre. There were strong arguments on both sides. On the British, there was the possibility of gaining the ridge from Ginchy to Martinpuich before the Germans could bring up reinforcements, and to attempt this seemed to Haig more promising than to renew the assault on the immensely strong position at Thiepval. His supply of heavy artillery was meagre by comparison with that of the French; and the fact that more heavy batteries and considerable stocks of shell were on their way was a further inducement to him to keep his offensive front narrow for the present. The position of Foch was difficult. South of the Somme he could not at the moment hope to do more than create a diversion, because above Péronne the river ran parallel to his front and formed a powerful barrier. Actually, the French advanced speedily till they reached the river overlooking Péronne and then halted with their right refused. Foch felt that for the moment his chief function was to support the

British, and with the resources at his disposal he could not do so and at the same time develop his action on the right. The consequence was that the area of true exploitation, north of the Somme, was now limited to about seven miles.

Haig failed in his project. By 13th July he had made fair progress by local attacks, especially in the neighbourhood of Contalmaison, though at a cost of very heavy losses; but fresh German divisions were appearing on the battlefield. On the 14th was launched the brilliant and famous British attack before dawn, which resulted in the capture of the Bazentins and 6000 yards of the German second system of defence. It was a fine success, but it ended at that. On 20th July the French XX. Corps also bit deeply into this second position.

Then began a slow and ferocious struggle for the ridge, all through the latter part of July, all through August, and continuing into September. Meanwhile the safety of Verdun had been assured; the French were enabled to devote fresh resources to the Somme front; and the Tenth Army of General Micheler was preparing to extend the attack for a distance of five miles south of the original frontage.

One of the most unfortunate characteristics of the battle was the constant postponement of the major operations. Over and over again it would be found that some fortified outpost of the German position threatened to enfilade a section of the next general advance. Rawlinson or Fayolle, or one of their corps commanders, would ask for time to reduce this outpost first. Such local attacks were not often completely successful and were invariably costly. Whether or not they paid their way is open to doubt; indeed, it was proved once or twice that the damage done to the

assaulting infantry by these centres of resistance in the course of a general attack was more than balanced by the fact that in such circumstances the enemy was forced to distribute his fire. Joffre, Foch, and Haig all disliked them, but the last-named had less objection to them than the two Frenchmen. Joffre loathed them, and thought Foch too accommodating in agreeing to them. In Haig's view from the middle of October onwards, the first necessity was a continuous and relentless pressure, with the object of wearing down the enemy's power of resistance. When this process had continued long enough there would, he was convinced, come a moment when the German defence would be so weakened that progress could be made at a speed never reached since siege warfare had set in. That resistance would be so undermined in 1916 he was by no means assured, but he felt some confidence that this would happen in the following year. With some temporary departures from it, he pursued this policy for the rest of the war.

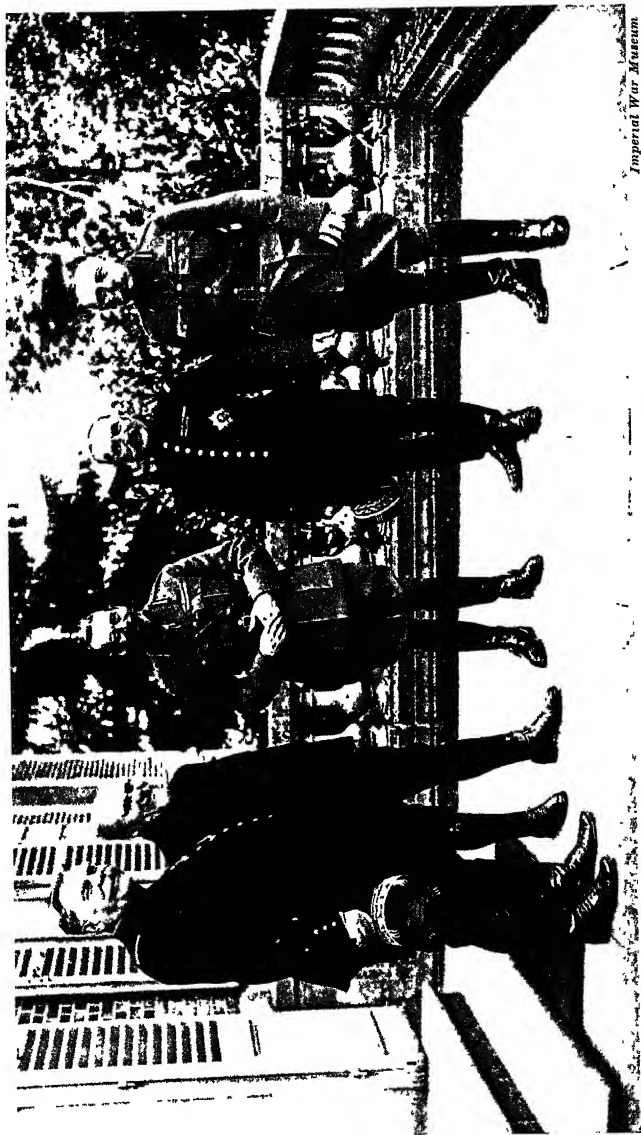
The next great effort against the ridge was carried out on 23rd July. On the front of Rawlinson's Fourth Army it was a dismal failure, though on its left the Reserve Army of Sir Hubert Gough made a little progress. Haig conferred with Foch and Fayolle at Dury on the 26th, and the three agreed to launch a combined attack against the sector from about Maurepas to Guillemont on the 30th. Again the British failed, and the French effort, if a shade more successful, was bitterly disappointing. Joffre summoned Foch to Chantilly on the 31st and urged him to convince the British of the necessity of attacks on a broad front. He could not do so.

August was the least productive month of the battle

where the British were concerned. It was a period of fierce milling at close quarters, with small gains, which could not always be maintained. The losses were fearful. In the one general Franco-British operation, on the 12th, the British again failed, as did the French on their immediate flank. Farther south they did better, capturing the German second position from Maurepas to the Somme.

So far, Haig's policy of attrition still looked forward to far-reaching results in September. He was right in his belief that this terrible struggle was imposing upon the Germans a strain which they could scarcely bear. We know it now from their own records; but even without that evidence the events of September would bear witness to the fact. For, as a whole, September was the most successful month of the battle. True, performance still failed to match promise, and there was never an action without a disappointment. Yet the front began to move again as it had not moved since 14th July; valuable ground was won; and the constant counter-attacks of the enemy gained no permanent successes.

The first assault was carried out at noon on 3rd September, on the whole British front to north of the Ancre and by the French on both banks of the Somme. The action had been put forward because of Joffre's desire to aid Rumania, which had just entered the war. Haig was scarcely ready; yet in four days' fighting the British right was advanced to a depth of nearly a mile, and the gains included the village of Guillemont. On their right the French took Le Forrest. Then the Tenth Army of General Micheler attacked farther south, but had only a limited success. The activity of Foch at this period was prodigious. Fayolle sometimes failed



Imperial War Museum

DURING THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

General Joffre, President Poincaré, King George V, General Foch, and General Sir Douglas Haig
at British Advanced G.H.Q., Beauquesne, 12th August, 1916

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to control headstrong corps commanders; Micheler's love of the theoretic diverted him from the practical; and the Army Group Commander had to deal with questions, such as artillery preparation and liaison with aircraft, which should have been outside his province.

The next big operation was on the 15th. It was to be preceded on the 14th by an operation on the part of the French Sixth Army, which had taken Bouchavesnes on the 10th. There was one of those accidents which can be avoided only by the exercise of a ruthless will, and that Fayolle, one of the most scientific of soldiers and beloved by his troops, did not possess. At the last moment one of his Corps Commanders demanded that the attack should be postponed four hours so that he might perfect his artillery preparation. Fayolle gave way. The result was disastrous, because warning of the postponement did not reach the assembling battalions of the other two Corps in time. In consequence, the attacks of all three failed.

Foch blazed with anger. The Sixth Army's mishap made it impossible for it to render the British operations next day any assistance save the capture of a farm on their flank, and, of course, by supporting them with artillery. Nevertheless, the British attack was one of the most successful of the battle. For the first time they employed the new weapon which they had forged in secret, the tank, with remarkable moral and even material effect. Flers, Martinpuich, and Courcellette were taken, and the German third line was captured on a front of 4500 yards. And then at last Micheler gained a series of fine successes. Berny was captured on the 15th, Deniécourt and Vermandovillers on the 18th; but these villages were far from the main scene of action.

Despite bad weather, which turned the ground to the consistency of liquid glue, Haig decided to continue the pressure on his right. He was hampered by the fact that at the point of junction between the two forces Combles still held out, and even more by the inability of the French to take Frégicourt, on the slope south of the valley in which Combles lay. On 17th September he saw Foch, who promised that a fresh division should be brought in to deal with Frégicourt. The attack was postponed until the 25th and launched at 12.35 p.m., to suit the French. The British preferred dawn assaults; but Fayolle generally demanded a final bombardment by his strong heavy artillery and daylight to observe the results.

This time the British aim was to capture objectives left over from the last battle, Morval, Lesbœufs, and Gueudecourt. The first two were taken; the third was not. The French captured Rancourt but failed at Frégicourt.

Late that night Foch called on Haig and freely admitted his disappointment that the French appeared to be failing the British on their flank. (In truth, while he was speaking the French were fighting their way into Frégicourt, which had fallen by the following morning.) He pointed out that he had little room between the Somme and the British right, especially as much of the front was filled by the big Bois de Saint-Pierre-Vaast, still uncaptured. Haig at once offered to shift the boundary farther north, handing over Lesbœufs and Morval to the French. This extension of their front, far from being unwelcome, was useful to them, and Foch was grateful. But before the adjustment had been made the troops of both armies, working in liaison, pinched out Combles. Gueudecourt was also taken by

the British with upwards of 400 prisoners. It was for them one of the most successful efforts of the battle.

Everywhere save on his left Haig's troops were now well over the ridge. He had taken control of the battle and was determined to advance almost due north from his positions south of the Ancre, combining this movement with an offensive eastward from Beaumont-Hamel. He was ambitious enough to hope that by this means he would cut off the Germans in the Ancre valley.

Now, however, the influence of the weather became decisive. After the comparatively brilliant results of September, October, with its frequent rain, was dismal. The British got Le Sars early, but thereafter made little progress. Rain, mud, and blood were the outstanding characteristics of this stage.

Joffre fought on. He saw Haig, as it were, turning his back on the French and limiting objectives to such an extent that even when they were captured, their capture did not compel any move on the part of the German artillery. He urged him to resume without delay actions on a bigger scale in the direction of Bapaume, "as was your previous intention". He sent Foch to Beauquesne to reason with him. Foch making no impression—he was, perhaps, wearying of the battle—Joffre came himself on 22nd October. Haig turned upon him with the retort that he, as British Commander-in-Chief, must be allowed to judge what could be undertaken and at what time he should undertake it.

There was a flare-up, but Joffre quickly regained his temper and at luncheon was all smiles. Yet he was already looking forward, not to anything that could be accomplished in the mud, but to what he would do

next year. Haig promised him that he would keep up pressure on the enemy during the winter.

One last brilliant offensive was carried out by Gough's Army astride the Ancre, resulting in the capture of Beaumont-Hamel on 13th November and of Beaucourt next day. Then the fighting died down. A final heavy blow was to have been struck in December by Micheler, south of the Somme, but it was put off again and again. At last there arrived the date, nearly fatal for France and the whole alliance, 13th December, when Joffre quitted the French command. The first act of his successor, General Nivelle, was to cancel the operation.

CHAPTER XII

DISREPUTE

THE Battle of the Somme was over, and the cost had to be counted. The losses represented a stupendous figure, nearly 200,000 for the French, over 400,000 for the British. The Allies had proclaimed that the enemy was suffering far more heavily than they were themselves, but it began to be suspected that the generals were cheating and that the butcher's bill was markedly in favour of the Germans. In fact, the German casualties were almost as great as those of the Allies, possibly even greater.

The tactics of the Somme may have been clumsy, but no boast in the Allied *communiqués* is belied by the German official history. There had been moments when German commanders literally did not know how to plug the breaches, where to look for aid. The German Army had been dealt a blow from which it never wholly recovered. Its leaders had decided that it could no longer withstand the succession of terrific shocks and had already begun the construction of a great retrenchment—to be known to the Allies as the "Hindenburg Line"—in order to withdraw their troops from the conflict and create reserves by shortening the front. More remarkable still, recognizing that the magnificent machine which had been so successful and had fought the war on hostile soil was now strained to nigh breaking-point, they had agreed to the launching of a campaign for peace. After the capture of Bucharest, which crowned

her victory over Rumania, Germany made her overture on 12th December, speaking as a conqueror but also as a nation shocked by the woes which war was bringing upon humanity.

This was as yet unknown to the Allies, though it was known that Falkenhayn had been dismissed in favour of Hindenburg and his indispensable coadjutor Ludendorff. There was a general feeling of impatience with the methods by which the war had been conducted. In our country this led to the fall of the Asquith Ministry and the rise to power of Mr. Lloyd George. In France it also led to the fall of a ministry, that of Briand, but its first effect was to bring down Joffre, and with him Foch.

The methods of Joffre, it was said, were out of date. New methods, it was claimed, had already proved their quality at Verdun, where General Nivelle had gained a fine success in October, a success, however, which would have been impossible but for the absorption of German reserves on the Somme. Against Foch there was a whispering campaign. He was identified with the methods of Joffre, which were those of the Somme. (Actually, they were not his, and he had, as we have seen, issued a warning that the resources were insufficient for decisive success.) He was growing old; his health was bad; his temper was worse. (Actually, his temper may have been a little frayed, but his health was perfectly sound.) He could have been got rid of on the ground of age; for sixty-five was the official limit. But the campaign against him had scarce begun when he reached his birthday, 2nd October. By special decree he was listed as available for further employment in high command. He was also awarded the *médaille militaire*, the equivalent of our Distinguished Conduct Medal,

that is, a reward for gallantry designed for the rank and file but specially bestowed on high commanders, already Grand Officers of the Legion of Honour, as a supreme distinction.

It has been suggested that Joffre threw him to the wolves in hope of himself escaping their fangs. Perhaps the real truth is that Joffre had merely fixed upon Nivelle as his chief lieutenant for next year's campaign. The version given by Foch, in smiling mood, was that he found the Commander-in-Chief in obvious embarrassment. After a long pause Joffre exploded with: "My poor Foch, they don't want any more of you!" "Non-sense, General," replied Foch, "you are going to drop me. Well, listen to me. Joffre may throw out Foch to-day, but Nivelle will throw out Joffre to-morrow. What you are doing won't save you." Another tale, which does not conflict with this, is that behind a closed door voices were raised in anger and that Joffre's was heard to shout: "You are unstuck (*limogé*); I shall be unstuck; we shall all be unstuck!" We may allow the listener at the keyhole his success—for it is a pretty enough story of its kind—and his kindred their joy in discovering that Foch lost his temper. Yet which of us can maintain our dignity before keyholes? To the world, to General Weygand, even, Foch maintained his. No word of reproach or petulance was heard from him, and he did not invite condolences.

These stories are perhaps trivial, and they are both well known. There is another incident which is of high importance and has never been recorded in print. One day in early December Weygand called at the Grand-Quartier-Général. Pellé, the *Major-General*, or Chief of the Staff, told him that he had a question to ask, regarding which he demanded in advance the strictest

secrecy. "On your word of honour, is your Chief fit to take over command of the French armies at once?" "Yes," replied Weygand without hesitation. "Then it's not true that he's exhausted and becoming unbearable?" insisted Pellé. "I can only tell you," said Weygand, "that I am always with him and that I see no sign of it."

This proves, in the first place, that the ingenious Aristide Briand was contemplating the appointment of Foch as Commander-in-Chief. If Briand had been as bold as he was ingenious, the sufferings and desperate risks of France might have been lessened, and, indeed, the post-war world might have been burdened with a lighter load. It shows, secondly, that the rumours about the health of Foch were circulated so that he might be the more easily removed.

The new Commander-in-Chief, General Nivelle, treated Foch with respect. He suggested that he should remain at the front and establish himself at Senlis, between the Forests of Chantilly and Halatte and near the Grand-Quartier-Général, for the purpose of studying certain questions. Weygand accompanied him, but Desticker was promoted to be Chief of the Staff of the G.A.N. and remained with General Franchet d'Espérey, who took over that command.

The most important problem entrusted to Foch was the possible violation of Swiss territory by the enemy. The probable object would be a lightning stroke against Italy, and of this the Italians were very nervous. It occurred, however, to General Nivelle that the Germans might also launch an offensive through Switzerland in the direction of Lyons. In either case a counter-attack against their lines of communication, if possible with Swiss co-operation, seemed the best method of parrying

the menace. A plan was worked out whereby a force of thirty divisions could be concentrated near the frontier within ten days. It was to be known as the Groupe d'Armées d'Helvétie and was to be commanded by Foch.

General de Castelnau, commanding the Groupe d'Armées de l'Est, consisting of the Seventh and Eighth Armies on the French right, was sent on a mission to Russia. On 19th January, 1917, Nivelle sent Foch to take over these armies. Foch established himself at Mirecourt, his temporary command being known as the "Groupement Foch". The two weak eastern armies were strung out over a wide front, but in the event of success in the main operations on the Aisne they were also to take the offensive. Foch had to busy himself with plans to that end and also with the Swiss scheme.

The Swiss were difficult to approach. They were jealous of their neutrality and fearful of seeming to favour one side more than the other. Negotiations dragged on, and Foch had handed back his command to Castelnau and returned to Senlis before the Swiss Government agreed to talk with anyone other than the French Military Attaché. Then, recognizing that they had obviously nothing to fear from France and possibly a good deal from Germany, they allowed Colonel Sprecher von Bernegg, their Chief of the Staff, to receive General Weygand.

Meanwhile the Italian command was still anxiously debating the possibility of a German reinforcement of the Austrian forces in Italy. Foch was deputed to visit General Cadorna. Thus it happened that he and Weygand set out almost simultaneously, Weygand to Switzerland and Foch to Italy.

Weygand's mission was as successful as any such negotiation with a neutral could be. A verbal agreement was reached that France should be called in to the aid of Switzerland if her neutrality were violated. French troops were not to cross the frontier without invitation, which would be given only on receipt of a German ultimatum demanding right of passage. It was at least a good insurance policy, especially as the Swiss now set about improving their defences.

Foch left on 5th April and met Cadorna at Vicenza on the 8th. He found the Comando Supremo prepared to face an Austrian offensive in strength, but anxious for Franco-British aid if the Germans intervened. Foch, somewhat surprisingly, was prepared to send a small Franco-British army corps to form a nucleus to further reinforcements, if needed, and to "show the flag". This project fell through; Cadorna only wanted the troops if he learnt that Germany was getting ready to strike. One cannot avoid feeling that to have sent any that spring would have been to play the enemy's game. As it turned out, Foch had simply to arrange for the despatch of troops if Cadorna called. Plans were worked out quickly, and Foch was back in Paris on 15th April.

In his absence the British had attacked at Arras and gained considerable success, including the complete capture of Vimy Ridge. The day after his return the great French offensive on the Aisne, the do-or-die venture to make way for which Joffre had been removed, was launched. This was to have been a breakthrough with a vengeance, and more. The complete rupture of the hostile front, the defeat of the German reserves, and the expulsion of the enemy from French soil in one series of operations was the goal. The result was a victory by the standard of previous offensives,

but Nivelle had raised hopes so high that the disparity between promise and performance was fatal to himself and nearly fatal to the army. He left his successor a sorry legacy of mutiny and general despondency. Pétain was appointed Commander-in-Chief on 17th May, and Foch was given Pétain's former post, that of Chief of the General Staff of the Army at the Ministry of War.

The "disgrace" of Foch lasted less than five months. For nearly half that time he was commanding an Army Group, and another ten days was spent on the trip to Italy, which was to bear good fruit in time to come. The affair of Swiss neutrality also, though nothing came of it, was not without importance.

If he had been feeling the strain, the comparative restfulness of these months must have been soothing to him, despite the grave anxieties of the moment and his own impatience with his situation. A friend living four miles from Senlis records that Foch walked over and back through the forest to pay a visit. It was no great effort of pedestrianism by his standard, but a man of sixty-five does not walk eight miles by choice if he is sick.

CHAPTER XIII

CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF

THOSE who know something of our military machinery in the Great War fail to realize that it was unique. The importance of the General Staff at the War Office, and especially the position of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, had no parallel among the other belligerents, whose Ministries of War were hand-maidens of their high command. Joffre, as Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies, issued orders to the French forces in Macedonia. He corresponded with the Russian, Italian, and Rumanian commands. Haig, the British Commander-in-Chief, had nothing to do with British theatres of war other than his own or with the military affairs of Russia, Italy, and Rumania.

There was a change when Nivelle succeeded Joffre. Nivelle was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Armies of the North and North-east, that is, the French armies in the western theatre of war, only. Yet, in fact, Nivelle dealt directly with the Italian Comando Supremo and visited Italy to negotiate with General Cadorna.

M. Painlevé, the Minister of War in early 1917, was distrustful of Nivelle and determined that the Government should have more voice in the conduct of the war. For this purpose he appointed General Pétain Chief of the General Staff, with extended powers as "technical adviser" to himself. Within a few days, however, Nivelle was removed and succeeded as Commander-in-Chief by Pétain, and, as has been recorded, Foch succeeded Pétain at the Ministry of War.

Painlevé intended that the functions of Foch should be analogous to those of General Sir William Robertson in England; but this they never were. The French General Staff in Paris was divided into two sections, each with a Sub-Chief, dealing respectively with the "Front" and the "Interior". For the latter Foch could not work up much interest. His eyes were on the war. With regard to the "Front" he was required to give the Minister advice upon the plans of the Commanders-in-Chief in the West and in the East. That is to say, he had only one major campaign outside France with which to deal, whereas Robertson had four, Palestine, Macedonia, Mesopotamia, and East Africa. There was, moreover, an extra cog in the French machine. This was the general officer who acted as *Chef de Cabinet* to the Minister and to some extent carried out co-ordinating functions which in Whitehall fell to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff. Above all, after M. Clemenceau had become Minister of War in November, 1917, and had brought in as *Chef de Cabinet* his friend, the able, energetic, and slightly officious General Mordacq, who wanted all the strings in his hands, the work of Foch was circumscribed. In brief, the intention of Painlevé that the rôle of Foch should be modelled on the British design was defeated by ignorance of that design, by its incompatibility with the composition and traditions of the Ministry, and by the deliberate intention of Clemenceau and Mordacq. Not that either desired to clip the wings of Foch; far from it, as we shall soon see.

The consequences were not wholly unhappy when the Italian crisis occurred at the end of 1917; for Foch was then able to devote to Italian affairs time which he might not otherwise have been in a position to spare.

The situation when Foch took over his new office was not bright. The French had dissipated their strength and spirit in the Nivelle offensive, and Russia was collapsing. Painlevé, and Pétain with him, were determined to await the arrival of the American Army before resuming offensive operations. Haig, Foch, and Robertson were so far in agreement with them that they desired to carry on only warfare of attrition in the West for the time being. Unfortunately, the French were unable to play their part. They suffered minor reverses which they could not remedy and put off promising operations on Pétain's plea that he had not sufficient reliable troops. The weight was shifted more and more to British shoulders, and in the grim offensive of "Third Ypres" the British took over the task of fighting the enemy, with the assistance of a small French army on their left flank. The only important French operations were Pétain's brilliantly successful but short and limited battles at Verdun in August and at Malmaison, on the Aisne, in October.

To Foch there fell one most unpleasant task. He was appointed with General Gouraud to sit on a commission of inquiry into the conduct of the Nivelle offensive, under the presidency of the veteran General Brugère. It would have been easy enough to find a verdict pleasing to the politicians then in power, but the commission was not seeking popularity. The report was not unfavourable to Nivelle, who was finally appointed by Clemenceau to the command of the troops in Algeria, and on his return in 1920 became a member of the *Conseil supérieur de la Guerre*.

A far more important question was the probable complete defection of Russia. Foch thought it was coming. In a paper drawn up by him for an Allied

conference which met in Paris on 25th July, he considered the possible transfer of all the German resources, with Austrian aid, from the East to the West. He estimated that France, Great Britain, and Belgium could assemble enough troops to hold the enemy until the American forces restored the balance. It would, however, be necessary to hasten the arrival of the Americans and, above all, to establish unity of action by means of a permanent Inter-Allied council. Leaving that message to be digested, he slipped away in August to the quietude and peace of Brittany. Madame Foch had been there from time to time, but this was his first and only visit to Trofeunteuniou while the war lasted.

With regard to Russia, there was a tendency to look upon him as an alarmist. But on 8th November the Bolsheviks seized power, and by 15th December they had concluded the Armistice of Brest-Litovsk with Germany and Austria. Russia's defection was, indeed, anterior to these events. The inactivity of her armies since August had enabled Ludendorff to transfer to Italy a force of some six German divisions and a mass of heavy artillery to stiffen the Austrian armies there. What the prophetic eye of Cadorna had seen came to pass. On 24th October the Austrians and Germans launched a great offensive in the Julian Alps. One Italian army speedily broke up in rout. Now the visit of Foch and the arrangements he had made bore fruit. "If you have need of our troops we are ready to march," he telegraphed. It was at once decided to send out Duchêne with four divisions and a suitable amount of heavy artillery. Robertson, for Great Britain, would for the moment agree to the despatch of two divisions only, in the belief that the surprise blow at Cambrai

which Haig was preparing would be the most effective aid that Britain could give to Italy. The danger was so pressing that the French Government decided to send Foch himself with full powers. He left Paris on 28th October and reached Treviso on the morning of the 30th.

It seemed probable that the Italians would not be able to make a stand short of the Piave. Foch decided to detrain the first French troops at Vicenza, but afterwards at the request of the Comando Supremo changed his mind and ordered them to proceed to Brescia and Verona. On the 31st he conferred with Robertson, who had also arrived. Then he hurried off to meet the King of Italy and journeyed to Rome with Signor Orlando, the Premier. The latter declared that Italy would continue to resist even if the struggle had to be carried to Sicily. Foch admired his resolution, but smiled at his manner of displaying it. "There is no question of that," he retorted, "it is on the Piave that you must resist." He had spoken similar words at Ypres; he was to speak them again at Doullens. It is well known, too, that he uttered stronger phrases to certain Italians who had less than Orlando's courage.

On 5th November he went to Rapallo, for a new Allied conference. The Italians pressed for a total of fifteen Franco-British divisions. Foch and Robertson could not agree, and pointed out that the Italians were multiplying by three or four the number of German divisions present or on the way to their front. It was, however, arranged that each country should send six divisions if they were required—actually, the British did not send a sixth division and the total number was eleven. Foch had always considered that the Italians were capable of making a stand on the Piave, and this

they contrived to do before the reinforcements arrived.

The conference of Rapallo gave birth to that machinery which Foch had demanded. The fifth session, on 7th November, was officially considered the first session of the Supreme War Council, to which all the plans of the Allies were to be submitted. It was to have its seat at Versailles—handy for Paris, but to some extent, Mr. Lloyd George hoped, removed from the influence of the French Government and the Ministry of War. For the same reason he insisted that the military advisers, the "Military Representatives" as they were called, who were to form the staff and to sit permanently, should hold no other office. Foch was appointed French Military Representative, but would have to give up the post if his Government wished him to remain at the Ministry. In the event, they refused to spare him, and Weygand went to Versailles. This did not, however, debar Foch from attending the meetings of the Council.

It appeared that Duchêne was unequal to the task of commanding the French Army and at the same time "keeping his end up" with the Italians. Foch had been for some time urgently demanding that Fayolle should be sent. There was perhaps a lurking hope here that, in view of Fayolle's seniority and present position as an Army Group Commander, the British would put their detachment under his orders; but this Robertson refused to do, pointing out with some pleasure that its commander, Plumer, was the most senior of British general officers. However, the essential was that the French commander should be not only senior in standing and thoroughly competent but also a gunner. Foch thought well of the Italian soldiers, but less well of the officers, many of whom appeared to him to be

ignorant. The weakest were the artillery officers, and he was in hopes that Fayolle, a scientific gunner, would favourably influence Italian artillery methods. Foch refused all substitutes and got the man he wanted. Two days later, on 23rd November, he set out for France, leaving affairs in Italy reasonably stable. He was away from his post for just a month. The President of the Republic, writing in his diary of the difficulty experienced in finding the right man for Italy, had added: "Of course, so long as Foch remains, all is well."

One more powerful, by virtue of his office, than M. Poincaré had equal confidence in Foch. In the latter's absence an event had occurred which was to affect him closely. Clemenceau had assumed office as President of the Council and Minister of War. This man, old and ailing as he was, brought a fiery energy to the conduct of the war. He and his *fidus Achates* Mordacq put their heads together and vowed themselves to the task of placing Foch in the post of Allied Commander-in-Chief. Clemenceau made suggestions to this effect, but the response of the British was cold. Lloyd George might possibly have agreed, but Haig had vivid memories of a trick played upon him in early 1917 when he was nearly rushed into the position of a mere cipher to Nivelle. Clemenceau had to resign himself to await a better opportunity. He would, he remarked grimly and prophetically, perhaps require the aid of German cannon.

Foch returned in the midst of the Battle of Cambrai, the last Allied offensive before the initiative passed to the Germans. Already discussions were in progress about the extension to the Oise of Haig's front, which had been shortened when the British assumed the main

rôle in early summer. For the next four months Foch was occupied in attempting to induce the Governments and high commands of France and Britain to work in combination, in order to meet the great offensive which it was certain Germany would launch now that she had Russia off her hands and could secure considerable superiority of numbers in the West.

It was no easy task. Foch put the situation clearly. The offensive would fall at intervals on several parts of the front; special defensive dispositions were being made to meet it, but the Allied attitude should not be passive; if the enemy attacked, the Allies should not only counter-attack on the front of his offensive but also themselves undertake counter-offensives on other previously selected fronts; if he did not attack, they should carry out limited offensives. Here Foch was defeated; Pétain did not believe that Franco-British resources sufficed for any attacks and insisted on a strictly defensive attitude till the Americans were ready.

Then Foch turned to the problem of providing an Allied reserve. Could there be such a thing without an Allied Commander-in-Chief? That proposition was taboo, it appeared. Very well, said Foch in effect, but in any event there must be a reserve. A committee to handle reserves does not commend itself to the military mind, but if no one man was to be allowed to do so, then there must be a committee. He suggested, at a meeting of the Supreme War Council which began on 30th January, 1918, that it should be formed by the Chiefs of the General Staffs of France, Great Britain, and Italy.

Here Lloyd George struck in, very sensibly, that new machinery, the Supreme War Council, having been

set up, more was not wanted. In view of the experience of General Foch, he would like to see him join the existing organization for the present purpose. To that everyone agreed. An Executive Committee was constituted with Foch as president and the Military Representatives of Great Britain, the United States, and Italy as members, to fix the strength of the reserve and of each national contingent, to direct how it was to be disposed, and even decide how it should be used.

All then seemed plain sailing. The committee decided that thirty divisions were necessary: nine or ten British, thirteen or fourteen French (including three British and four French from Italy), and seven Italian. Yet when the reserve was called for it was not forthcoming. Pétain was slightly more accommodating than Haig, who was like a brick wall in his resolution to keep his reserve under his own hand. It were hard to declare with conviction that either was wrong.

It was February now, and the danger was drawing closer. March was half over ere the discussion reached its end. The Supreme War Council travelled to London and there agreed that, though the reserve as projected was desirable in principle and should be found later on, in view of the imminence of the German offensive the question must be postponed. So a householder might propose to buy a pistol in order to resist a threatened raid on his safe, and then, hearing that the burglars were coming on Wednesday, decide to defer his purchase till Friday, because he had not time to practice at the butts. Foch recorded a strong protest.

It was, however, agreed that the French and British Commanders-in-Chief should study the problem of mutual aid. The final arrangements made were that each Commander-in-Chief should stand his ground and

control his own reserve; each should prepare to help his colleague if the latter were attacked; and no plans should be made for a counter-offensive.

Another problem gave cause for reflection. How should the American troops, when they arrived, be used to the best advantage? That they would be of high quality was certain; but they would enter the struggle without experience of modern war on a large scale, as regards the vastly greater proportion of them without any military experience whatsoever and with very little training. The best part of a year back, soon after the United States entered the war, the methodical Pétain had drawn up a scheme for an *amalgame*, whereby the American infantry would be distributed by regiments to French and British divisions. It was obviously the quickest way to employ American infantry, and it was infantry that was chiefly wanted. Yet it was improbable that a great and proud nation would consent to its armies being used in such a manner. General Pershing, the American Commander-in-Chief, said so very forcibly, adding with truth that if his troops were engaged in these conditions they would lose much of their fighting value. Joffre, who had visited the United States since his fall and had become extremely popular there, emerged from his obscurity to reinforce the arguments of Pershing. By this action he angered Clemenceau, who was backing Pétain over the *amalgame* with all his energy.

Foch steered a middle course, then and later. He recognized the force of Pershing's arguments and the danger of wounding American sentiment; but he also saw that, left to themselves, the Americans would be ponderously deliberate. A middle course was, in fact, pursued, not without recriminations on both sides but

with fairly satisfactory results. Foch made mistakes, but when dealing with men of another nation he generally succeeded, because he had an instinct for appreciating the other side's point of view which is by no means the strong point of his countrymen.

It may appear that he had obtained little of his own way. Certainly the arrangements made to meet the German onslaught were not such as he had advocated. They could not, in fact, be ideal while there was no supreme command; for no leader would, if he could help it, put his reserves at the disposal of an Aulic Council. Yet useful progress had been made in the plans for mutual support, and that progress was largely due to him. More important still, his personal stock had risen, not because he boomed it but because of its manifestly good quality and promise. The belief was sinking in that if ever a final arbiter were needed, here was the man; and but for this belief he would not have been so readily accepted. If the Supreme War Council accomplished little else of value for the cause of the Allies, it paved the way for Ferdinand Foch to reach the supreme command.

CHAPTER XIV

GENERALISSIMO

AT 4.40 a.m. on 21st March, 1918, the German artillery opened the most intense bombardment yet witnessed in warfare. It extended from the Oise to the Scarpe, covering the front of Gough's Fifth Army and most of Byng's Third. Further bombardments, whose object was deception, were carried out elsewhere. At about 9.45, in dense fog, a general assault with three-fold superiority of numbers was launched on a front of fifty-four miles.

The war had entered upon a new phase. It has been said that unimaginative tactics on the part of the Allies were succeeded by imaginative tactics on the part of the Germans, but this is far too sweeping a verdict. In fact, the sudden "Durchbruch" was in large degree made possible by certain technical artillery methods—improved calibration, sound-ranging, and flash-spotting—which had been exploited by the British at Cambrai and reached their zenith just when the Germans were ready to take advantage of them. That is not to deny the masterly organization and tactical skill with which Ludendorff exploited them.

His strategy was rough and ready. His principle was always to "punch a hole" and make the rest follow. Broadly speaking, his design was to break through to the Crozat Canal and the Somme, form a flank to hold off the French as they moved to the succour of the British, and simultaneously wheel his right and centre

northwards behind Arras. A great offensive against the French in Champagne and two against the British in Flanders were being prepared, to be ready for the transfer of his "battering train".

Well hidden as the concentration had been, the attack was expected and its frontage fairly accurately estimated. A system of defence in depth had been instituted with the object of gradually pulling up the onslaught rather than facing the shock on a single line. The dispositions were, however, still too rigid. Orders to the outposts to defend their ground to the last, and wired-in keeps which actually prevented their retreat, involved the loss of one-third of the infantry of each division, which must inevitably be overrun. Moreover, the front of the Fifth Army on the right was very thinly held, with scanty reserves.

The success of the Germans was not universal, but by evening they had bitten deeply into the Fifth Army defences, especially south-west of Saint-Quentin. Unable to restore the situation here, Gough ordered his right to withdraw behind the Crozat Canal. On the 22nd the enemy's progress was even more alarming west of Saint-Quentin, and at midnight Gough ordered a further withdrawal, behind the Somme to Péronne.

According to their promises, the French began to send reinforcements. Whereas, however, they had calculated that four days would be available to concentrate them, they had in fact to rush up infantry in lorries and throw it into the fight without artillery and often with no more small-arms ammunition than was carried on the man. Even allowing for their difficulties, their staff work was in some cases poor. Four cavalry divisions, whose mobility would have been invaluable, were in the interior, watching for possible revolutionary

outbreaks in industrial areas. In these circumstances the French divisions lost ground as rapidly as, and often more rapidly than, the exhausted and depleted British formations which they relieved. Pétain did not believe that the main blow had yet been struck, and kept an anxious eye on Champagne. He increased his reinforcements, but would not listen to Haig's suggestion that a mass of twenty divisions should be concentrated west of Amiens.

The German advance continued swiftly, above all in the centre. The strain about Roye, at the junction between British and French, became terrible. If the line here were stretched till it snapped, what would happen? Haig thought chiefly of the Channel ports, Pétain of Paris. The latter actually instructed Fayolle, if further pressed, to fall back south-westwards in order to cover the capital. Haig then took a step which should be gratefully remembered. Late on the night of the 24th he wired for Lord Milner, a member of the War Cabinet, to come out. The war, he thought, was lost unless a man with vision wider than that of Pétain were brought in to co-ordinate the defence, and Foch was the man in his mind. Milner had, in fact, already started. The new Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir Henry Wilson, came at once.

Foch, watching from his post of military adviser to his Government, forestalled Haig. That Sunday afternoon, before Pétain issued his grave order, Foch and Loucheur, Minister of Munitions and the ablest member of the Clemenceau Cabinet, went to the President of the Council with a memorandum on the necessity for a supreme command. Clemenceau, though he had striven for this, doubted whether it would help at the moment. Loucheur pressed him hard. Clemenceau

then demanded what Foch could do that the others could not. Unlike Pétain and Haig, Foch could always find an answer to such questions by a civilian.

"Oh," he said airily, "I should use my old methods. I fix a wafer here, another there, a third there. Soon the Germans advance only gradually. Then we stop them."

Energy and confidence radiated from him; he was the embodiment of force. Clemenceau was not easily impressed, but he felt the magnetism and he was convinced. "*Quel bougre!*" he remarked appreciatively and elegantly to Loucheur.

Owing to a misunderstanding, there were two inconclusive conferences on the 25th, one at Compiègne, the other, between Haig, Wilson, and Weygand, at Abbeville. Haig announced a decision as fatal as Pétain's—but subsequent to Pétain's and in consequence of it: if the pressure became too great to bear the British Army must retreat slowly fighting, covering the Channel ports.

On the 26th the most important conference of the war assembled in the Hôtel de Ville of Doullens. A British Army Commanders' conference preceded it, and the representatives had to wait for Haig. Foch wandered off into the school, which had been his headquarters in November, 1914, to refresh his spirit with memories of what had been accomplished in those desperate days. Pétain talked with Clemenceau. A fine soldier, but a pessimist in grain, he announced gloomily that he expected to see the British destroyed in the open field. No commander, protested Clemenceau, should say such things, nor even think them. Milner, eager to put Foch in control, learnt with delight that Haig had already asked for him.

The representatives sat down, M. Poincaré presiding.¹ The French Commander-in-Chief remarked that everything possible must be done to defend Amiens.

"We must fight in front of Amiens, fight where we are now!" struck in Foch. Not another inch must be yielded without a fight; everyone must be made to understand that; the junction of the armies must stand fast.

But how was it to be done? The British said they had no more reserves to put in south of the Somme. Pétain hoped eventually to relieve them thus far, but only gradually.

"If General Foch will give me his advice I will gladly follow it," said Haig.

After a word apart with Milner, Clemenceau proposed to confide the direction of the defence to Foch. He wrote out a formula, which was accepted after two minor corrections:

"General Foch is charged by the British and French Governments with the co-ordination of the Allied Armies on the Western Front. He will make arrangements to this effect with the two Generals-in-Chief, who are invited to furnish him with the necessary information."

"I believe, gentlemen, we have worked well for victory," said Clemenceau.

As they sat down to luncheon at the Hôtel des Quatre Fils Aymon, well known to British officers, he remarked with the malice he could never long restrain: "Well,

¹ There were present MM. Clemenceau and Loucheur, Generals Pétain, Foch, and Weygand; Lord Milner, Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, Generals Wilson, Lawrence (Chief of the General Staff), and Montgomery (representing General Rawlinson, British Military Representative at Versailles).

you've got the position you wanted so much!" Foch replied that to take over a lost battle could hardly excite his ambition. That afternoon he set off on a long drive recalling the winter days of 1914. The case was at least as serious now. Methodically he drew up his programme:

1. The French and British troops must remain in close touch to cover Amiens.

2. With this object, the forces already engaged must be maintained in their positions at all costs.

3. Under their protection reinforcing French divisions will assemble, to be employed: (a) first, to consolidate the British Fifth Army; (b) secondly, to form a mass of manœuvre in conditions to be decided later.

This was the old method. In fact, it was more than a step taken to meet a particular emergency; it amounted to a strategical principle, almost to a philosophical conception. Some weeks later Weygand, for the benefit of the British Mission, explained and illustrated by examples three sayings often on the lips of Foch:

Jamais céder du terrain (or give the enemy an advantage without fighting for it).

Jamais faire la relève pendant la bataille (or commit to an obscure situation twice the number of divisions already engaged).

On fait ce que l'on peut (with the means at one's disposal).

The first two were not absolute rules—in fact, they had on occasion to be completely disregarded—but all three were the first guiding principles which he applied to every problem of defence.

CHAPTER XV

DEFENSIVE

FOCH descended first upon Gough, at Dury, near Amiens. The unfortunate commander of the Fifth Army received a blast of unmerited invective, but also the welcome news that the handful of weary troops who had been striving to plug the breach between British and French would be relieved; meanwhile there was to be no further withdrawal. At Dury Foch met Barthélemy, Chief of the Staff to Fayolle, and gave him orders in the spirit of the programme set out in the last chapter. Next he visited Débeney, commanding the First Army on the British right, and issued personal instructions in the same sense. Without awaiting a written order from Foch, Pétain cancelled his instructions of 24th March, ordered Fayolle to cover Amiens and keep touch with the British, and arranged for him to be reinforced with ten more divisions and heavy artillery.

Foch drove back to Paris, arriving at midnight. To his wife, perturbed by the enormous responsibility he had taken on his shoulders, he said simply, "Pray God it is not too late!"

On the 27th he set out again, saw Humbert—the commander of the Moroccan Division at the Marne and now commanding the Third Army on Débeney's right—and Fayolle, the Army Group Commander, at Clermont, and visited Gough again at Dury. Affairs

with Débeney and Gough were still ugly, but at Beaulieu Byng had good news. The German progress north of the Somme seemed almost at an end. Back again at Clermont, a fresh catastrophe was reported. The Germans, pressing on the junction between the French Third and First Armies, had reached Montdidier, the French resistance having been mediocre in quality. Ludendorff, modifying his original plan, was exploiting his success in a drive due westward and had created another huge gap.

Yet the 28th March was perhaps the turning-point; for, though the Germans gained further success south of the Somme, they suffered a bloody repulse in their new offensive at Arras. Rawlinson relieved Gough, whom Haig was directed to offer up as a sacrifice. Next day the German attacks were strictly limited, and though they made much progress north of Montdidier, affairs were easier by nightfall. Pétain was piling up a reserve north-west of Beauvais, with the object of taking the offensive as soon as possible. But Foch waited, sniffing the wind. For the moment he would not relieve the British up to the Somme, as Haig desired. A last deadly drive at Amiens ended on the 31st. The battle flared up again on 4th April, but it was over by the 5th except that the Germans proceeded to occupy, without heavy fighting, the untenable pocket immediately south of the Oise.

The authority of Foch required strengthening. On 3rd April he was accorded the "strategic direction of military operations"; tactical control was left in the hands of the Commanders-in-Chief, with the right of appeal to their Governments. He then pointed out that he was still nominally Chief of the General Staff, a title nowise corresponding to his functions. Finally,

on 14th April, he was given that of "Général en Chef des Armées Alliées en France".

We may for a moment turn aside to glance at the personal existence of the new Generalissimo. He stayed for a couple of nights with an improvised staff at Clermont, then moved temporarily to Beauvais. A large town did not suit him, because he liked quietude for reflection, though as of old he was much out on the roads. He moved several times, but the places which will always be most closely associated with his name are Sarcus—which he still used for conferences with Haig after he had left it—and Bombon, south-east of Paris.

The staff was a small one, intensely proud of serving him and of its appellation, "la famille Foch", with Weygand as *Major-Général* and Desticker *Aide-Major-Général*. Later on there arrived another officer of exceptional ability, Lieut.-Colonel Georges, who as these words are written is Chief of the General Staff. There was no administrative side, and though an administrative staff was subsequently formed, it was kept farther back. French cynics have, indeed, pretended that it was created to please Mr. Lloyd George, who did not credit that any organization could flourish without an enormous personnel.

Life was well regulated. Foch was in his office by 8 a.m., with Weygand and Desticker in the next room. He demanded absolute punctuality at meals, though he never sat long at table, and at meals talk was allowed to relax. Otherwise, the officers worked all day and late into the night, except for an hour's walk or ride if business were not too pressing.

At the end of March there arrived a small British liaison staff, headed by Br.-General C. J. C. Grant,¹ who

¹ Now Lieut.-General Sir Charles Grant, G.O.C. Scottish Command.

had recently commanded a brigade but possessed considerable experience of staff work. A little later, in view of a sharp difference of opinion, Haig decided to place a senior general officer at the head of a British Mission. Weygand was content with affairs as they stood, and Foch at first refused the proposal, but Lieut.-General Sir John Du Cane, taken from the command of a corps in the midst of the Battle of the Lys, won the regard of both. After thorough consideration, he remarked to Grant, who remained with him: "I have come to the conclusion that our one chance of winning this war is to back this old man."

Discretion and tact were needed by the Mission, but even more important, in a situation where suspicion might easily have arisen, were openness and loyalty. They, too, were forthcoming. The system of private correspondence, which often leads to gossip and false impressions, was ruled out, and Weygand, as Grant told him one day, might have been allowed to read every report sent to G.H.Q. or the War Office.

Foch had given up his unsatisfactory cigars in favour of an English pipe, which he found more soothing. Grant brought him rare specimens from a famous London firm. He was not, however, an altogether successful smoker, and the pipe went out like the cigars till another British officer—or, as some say, Lloyd George—presented him with a useful tool, a combined spike and stopper. His dignity was well enough established for him to enjoy a certain waggishness on this subject, and when in good humour he would often raise a laugh against himself by a comical reference to "ma pipe". His addiction to it was well known and stood him in good stead with the troops of one ally; for, as students of recent politics are aware, the Englishman has

an instinctive trust in a man who is fond of his pipe.

Expecting another German offensive, without having any clear indication as to where it would come, Foch was averse to breaking up the French reserve which Pétain was accumulating. He turned down all the three alternatives which Haig put before him: a big wholly French counter-offensive, relief of the British to the Somme, the location of a French reserve behind Vimy Ridge. He agreed to move four divisions from the Beauvais area to that of Amiens, and then urged the British to adopt his own plan of pushing the Germans back from the neighbourhood of the Amiens-Paris railway by a combined counter-attack astride the Somme. The Germans struck first. On 9th April the offensive known as the Battle of the Lys was launched between Armentières and La Bassée.

On the failure of his attack at Arras, which may be called Act I, Scene 2, Ludendorff had decided to ring up the curtain on his second act. The immediate objective was Hazebrouck, a vital railway junction. The Messines Ridge was also to be taken, as a prelude to another thrust farther north, which was to destroy the British Army in Flanders.

The assault, following a bombardment of terrific violence, fell chiefly upon a Portuguese division, which was quickly captured or driven from the battlefield, and a British division on its left, which was forced back fighting. Next day the British evacuated Armentières and the Germans began a fresh drive farther north, which put them in possession of Messines.

From our point of view the incidents of the Battle of the Lys are less important than their reaction upon Foch. He was convinced that all the forces at the enemy's disposal were not yet committed, and he was therefore

anxious not to commit the French reserves prematurely. He refused Haig's urgent demand that the French should take over a portion of his front so as to increase those of the British. He was not blind to the danger; indeed, it appeared to him that the advance on Hazebrouck might only be a prelude to an advance on Calais, and he was more disquieted by the Lys offensive than by that subsequently carried out on the Aisne.¹ A counter-offensive against the southern side of the great bulge created by the German advance on the Somme, which was the obvious riposte, he would not yet countenance. Probably he had an acute perception of the fragility of some of the French divisions there, and, again, he would not break up his reserve to support them. Moreover, though some French officers considered that British resistance on the Somme had been weak, he himself had the liveliest faith in British doggedness. That he was bleeding the British to save the French, as Haig was tempted to believe, was not the case. The position in which he had been set, the trust imposed in him, raised a man of his character above such considerations. A proud boast—and few men boasted less often—uttered shortly before his death was well justified: "I am conscious of having served England as I served my own country."

Ironically enough, Pétain virtually accused him in June—and some French critics do so still—of bleeding the French to the advantage of the British.

He moved up the four divisions mentioned, and later reinforced them. He also shifted a further reserve northward, keeping it in such a position that it could move quickly into Flanders, intervene in case of a renewed offensive at Arras, and yet not lose touch with

¹ This information came from General Weygand by word of mouth.

the Somme front. Fortified by Haig's famous "Backs to the Wall" order, the British resisted fiercely. On the right the German advance slowed down as it came up against the Flanders heights; but farther south it was within six miles of Hazebrouck by the 12th. By the 17th the pressure seemed weaker, and spirits were somewhat raised by the fine action of the Belgians, who repulsed a heavy assault. It was the first time that the Allies had resisted an offensive with complete success. Yet the British were fought nearly to a finish, and Sir Henry Wilson even proposed to Foch that their line should be withdrawn over twenty miles in the centre, to the inundations created at Saint-Omer. Small need to say that Foch refused.

The French took over the line about Kemmel on the 18th. There was then a pause in the north, during which the Germans returned to the attack on the Somme, captured Villers-Bretonneux, which barred the road to Amiens, and were driven out of it again by the Austrians. Then on the 25th they assaulted Kemmel, and after an indifferent French defence the best observation post in Flanders was lost in a little over an hour.

It seemed that the danger was greater than ever; but in reality the view of Foch that the battle was at an end was correct. There was terrific fighting round the Scherpenberg on the 27th, but the line held. Then Ludendorff stopped the offensive.

Many problems had to be faced. First, where would the next blow fall? Arras seemed probable, but there was no clear evidence. Then, could an Allied counter-offensive be launched first? If so, it would be only on a small scale as yet. Returning to his old scheme, Foch set afoot preparations to free the Amiens-Paris railway, and also to drive the enemy back from the fringe of the

mining area in Artois. Next, there was the question of British effectives. Nine British divisions were to be reduced to cadre strength—and the number had to be added to after the next German offensive. Haig was anxious to reconstitute them, but he was not *persona grata* with the Prime Minister, so that the pressure of Foch on the British Government was a useful aid. Eventually, by means of reinforcements from Great Britain, battalions from Palestine and Salonika, and the employment of men of lower physical category, all the divisions but two were re-formed. Finally, there was the perilous situation of the French Army, with only a little over half its strength between the Oise and the Swiss frontier. To provide Pétain with further reserves Foch persuaded Pershing to hand over several more American divisions whose training was more or less complete. He also arranged that Haig should send some worn-out British divisions to relieve French divisions on a quiet front. The quiet front chosen was the Chemin des Dames ridge, north of the Aisne.

When, on 27th May, the most perfectly "mounted" of all the German offensives was launched in this very region, Foch was taken by surprise. He had expected Ludendorff to continue his policy of destroying the British Army, and after the assault he informed the astonished Clemenceau that in his view it was a feint. Though it penetrated far deeper than the Lys offensive, it never caused him equal anxiety.

He was correct from both points of view. Ludendorff had decided that before he made his third onslaught upon the British he must exhaust the French reserves, which had twice interfered with his plans. He thought that it would suffice for his purpose if he penetrated south of the Vesle, ten miles south of the front.

Foch had issued general instructions to the effect that north of the Oise ground was so valuable that none should be abandoned voluntarily; but that south of the river, where there was room for manœuvre, the foremost positions should be lightly held and the defence organized in great depth. Here his instructions were disregarded. The Army Commander was his old staff officer Duchêne, whose resolution had been invaluable in 1914. Unfortunately, his tactical sense was less prominent. The Germans had twice shown what they could do in the way of a break-through; the Chemin des Dames ridge, in shape not unlike our Hog's Back, except that it has long spurs projecting from its southern side, was an obviously unfavourable position on which to meet their onset. Duchêne had been warned by Pétain and the Army Group Commander, Franchet d'Espérey. Yet the bulk of his troops were kept so far forward that they were bound to suffer terribly from a hostile bombardment, and to lose their artillery in the event of an assault. Little provision was made to hold the line of the Aisne, a formidable barrier, and none to hold the ridge between the Aisne and the Vesle, an ideal defensive position. Pétain, who gave way to Duchêne, must bear a share of the responsibility, and, indeed, Foch cannot escape it; but neither can be blamed for the fatal handling of the local reserves, which were hurled into the battle instead of being directed to hold the line of the Aisne.

After a bombardment even weightier than the earlier ones, which reduced some of the survivors to a state bordering on lunacy, the Germans assaulted in superiority of numbers still greater than before. By about noon they were over the Aisne; by evening they had reached the Vesle at Courlandon, a distance of ten miles. Nothing of the sort had yet been accomplished in a first day's

assault. And worse was to follow. Driving back the scattered remnants of the original divisions and the first reinforcements pushed in, the enemy was across the upper Ourcq at Fère-en-Tardenois by the 29th. He next launched violent attacks south of the Oise against the French salient between the two great bulges produced by the Somme and Aisne offensives, with only too much success. Once again, Ludendorff was exploiting an easy victory, when, as we see now, with most of the available French reserve on the move to the battlefield, it would have paid him to break off the attack and turn at once against the British in Flanders and Artois. Yet Foch had still something up his sleeve.

It was for him a critical moment. Divisions melted as they were thrown into the furnace. Pétain called for the last available; and all the time Foch knew that Crown Prince Rupprecht had something like thirty in reserve, ready to fall upon the British.

On fait ce que l'on peut. He still clung to a reserve. The Belgians had not followed the Americans and Italians in placing themselves under his orders because by the terms of their constitution none but their King could command their troops; but they readily agreed to relieve the British down to Ypres. Haig assured the junction between French and British on the Somme, from which point French reserves had been drawn away by Pétain on his own initiative. Pershing handed over more trained or semi-trained divisions to both Pétain and Haig. Foch let Pétain skim the Somme front of troops in the line; but he held on resolutely to his detachment in Flanders. When Castelnau in the east declared that on his thinly held front he would, in case of attack, have to "manœuvre in retreat", Foch rounded on him and forbade any such talk. He issued another

directive: resistance must be carried out foot by foot, and every commander in the hierarchy must personally ensure that orders issued to the effect were obeyed. By 4th June the German advance was at an end.

Foch knew he had not long to wait. That same day he warned Haig that if the enemy renewed his advance in the direction of Paris on a larger front all the Allied forces might have to join in a battle to decide the fate of the war, and invited him to prepare the movement toward the front of every reserve he had. Haig protested and, as was his right, appealed to his Government, which demanded a conference in Paris on 7th June. Here Lord Milner declared that the British Government was as alarmed as their Commander-in-Chief at the prospect of the British reserves being withdrawn at a moment when a great German attack between the Lys and the Somme was still probable. Foch replied that he had called for prevision and preparation only, and would call for no more unless it were needed. The affair was amicably settled.

"Does not a big orchestra," he remarks in his memoirs, "take a certain time to tune its instruments? And when it is formed from diverse sources is there not also the problem of musical pitch?"

He was now pretty sure that the next assault would be between Montdidier and Noyon. At last he drew on his Flanders detachment—but only one division to begin with. He told Haig, however, to prepare to send two more, giving him back in exchange the tatters of two British divisions which had been through the Battle of the Aisne. French divisions in similar case and some American not yet in action he despatched to Lorraine. He would not be caught unprepared there by even a minor attack.

The attack was delivered on 9th June, in a southerly direction, its centre on Compiègne. It had not been prepared with quite the meticulous care of its predecessors and the superiority of numbers was less than usual. Though the Germans poured into the valley of the Matz, their progress was in general soon slowed down by the French reserve divisions.

A certain Charles Mangin, who has not appeared hitherto because his path had not crossed that of Foch, now comes upon our scene. The right-hand man of Nivelle, he had shared in his successes and been involved in his catastrophe. Not only had he been deprived of the command of his army; he had even, like a disgraced nobleman under the monarchy, been forbidden to live within a prescribed distance of Paris. Sanguine, haughty and headstrong, he was not easy to handle, but a wonderful instrument of war for the superior who knew how to do so. Now there was such a one, and Mangin was back, though only as a corps commander, in reserve. He and Foch were to be closely associated in the months to come. And to-day, as one enters the marshal's study at Trofeunteuniou, one's eye is at once arrested by a splendid photograph of that accipitrine head.

Mangin was ordered to launch an immediate counter-attack eastwards towards the Matz valley with four fresh divisions. When Fayolle found that most of the force, and especially the artillery, could not arrive till the night of the 10th, he was inclined to postpone the operation until the 12th. Mangin was burning to assault next day, and Foch supported him. Commanders were rushed up before the light failed, assigned on the ground their forming-up places and objectives, and bidden to guide their troops into position after dusk. At 11 a.m.

on the 11th the infantry went forward, and recaptured two villages with a thousand prisoners and a few guns. When resistance stiffened, the counter-attack, having served its purpose, was broken off. By 13th June there was calm once more. Good news from Italy followed. The Austrians—this time without German aid—attacked on the Piave on the 15th; but their gains were small, and they were speedily flung back over the river wherever they had crossed it.

The next step was a purge of the command, an unpleasant business where all had done their best; but all was at stake. Duchêne was succeeded by Degoutte; Anthoine, Pétain's Chief of the Staff, and many others were removed. Guillaumat was brought back from Macedonia to undertake the defence of Paris, and be at hand as understudy in case of an "accident", in any sense of the word, to Foch or Pétain, and was replaced by Franchet d'Espérey. The position of Foch himself was not wholly secure. He was undaunted, and wanted none to share his responsibility. When Lloyd George had a resolution passed giving the Supreme War Council power to initiate military plans, Foch refused to remain at his post unless it were annulled, and got his way.

He elaborated his instructions on defence in depth, with garrisons specially detailed to the second and third positions. Again he went into the question of reserves, instructing each Commander-in-Chief to be ready to support the other. This time it was Pétain who objected, on the plea that the British had had time to recover and could fend for themselves. He even appealed to the Government; but the only result was that his right to do so was withdrawn.

The Germans were obviously preparing two more offensives, one against the French and one against the

British. Would it be the Imperial Crown Prince who would strike first in Champagne and on the Marne or Rupprecht in Artois and Flanders? The former seemed the more probable. Foch therefore requested Haig to send four British divisions to the French front. The British Government were alarmed and invited an appeal from their Commander-in-Chief; but Haig, though Rupprecht's menace still overhung him, complied with the demand of Foch.

On 15th July the Germans duly attacked in Champagne and on the Marne. East of Reims Gouraud's skilful dispositions, his virtual abandonment of his foremost position, and his terrific counter-preparation, broke up the attack, which was finally shattered against the defences of the battle zone. On the Marne affairs were more serious. The enemy crossed the river at Dormans and farther east advanced five miles towards Epernay; but he was held up within two days.

It was his last blow. On the 18th Foch hit back.

CHAPTER XVI

COUNTER-OFFENSIVE

BEFORE the launch of the German Champagne-Marne offensive, the Allied Commander-in-Chief had already planned counter-strokes against the flanks of the Château-Thierry salient. They were to be ready by 18th July, if the enemy had not attacked by then. On the 15th, visiting Fayolle at Noailles, he learnt that the Army Group Commander was considering the withdrawal of troops assembled for the counter-attack on the west side of the salient, their despatch to the aid of the yielding line on the east side, and the postponement of the counter-attack itself. Foch directed that the counter-attack should go forward.

It was one of his finest decisions, yet it was far easier to make now than it would have been two months earlier. The scales were swinging level as American troops became ready for employment. Counting by divisions, the Allies had now 190 against 207, and the American were in fact twice as strong in infantry as the rest. In heavy artillery a slight superiority had been reached, and the enemy had virtually no tanks to oppose to many hundreds. Week by week, too, the strength of the Allies would grow, that of the Germans decrease.

The blow on the west side of the salient took the enemy by surprise. His foremost positions were overrun by the French tanks and infantry, but on recovering from the shock he opposed a stout resistance to Mangin, now an Army Commander, and Degoutte, as well as

to de Mitry hammering at the south side and Berthelot at the east. There was bitter fighting, in which the four British divisions, two on the west side and two on the east, took a gallant part. It was largely owing to the paralysing effect of Mangin's artillery upon their communications that the Germans evacuated the salient and by the end of July fell back to the Vesle and the Aisne. Anyhow, 30,000 prisoners, 800 guns, and the freeing of the main eastern railway between Château-Thierry and Epernay were the fruits of the second victory of the Marne.

There was a consequence more important still. Rupprecht's arm, upraised to smite the British, was suspended in mid-air. At first Ludendorff talked only of postponement and promised to replace divisions filched from the striking-force, but in the end he had to cancel the offensive because he dared not do otherwise. Now he was to taste of his own medicine.

Foch himself had survived a crisis, how serious he was probably not aware. When Berthelot reported that the Germans were about to attempt the passage of the Marne, Foch merely told him to limit their progress if they succeeded. There was uproar when Clemenceau was informed. He declared that Foch was not the man he had been and talked of replacing him. Colonel Grasset, the historian, then attached to the Secretary-General of the Council of War, tells us that he thought Foch was doomed when the Germans did in fact cross the Marne. Throwing discretion to the winds, Grasset unfolded a map, suggested what was about to happen, and begged that no decision should be taken for a few days. Actually Foch, with his counter-offensive ready, was not displeased that the enemy should cross the river.

It was one day in the last week of July that the possibility of swift victory flashed before the eyes of Foch. (" 'What am I risking, after all?' I asked myself. 'You can prepare for the worst and another year of fighting, but there is no crime in hoping for the best—decisive victory within a few months.' ")

"The Allied Armies," he wrote, "have thus reached the turning of the road. In the thick of battle they have regained the initiative; their strength permits them to keep it; the principles of war demand that they should do so.

"The moment is come to abandon the generally defensive attitude hitherto imposed by numerical inferiority and to pass to the offensive."

Though far from realizing how fast the tide, once turned, would run, France was heartened by the victory. To reward the General-in-Chief and affirm his authority she bestowed on him a signal honour. On 6th August he was created Marshal of France. He received the baton at Bombon on the 24th. The title, long in disuse, had been revived for Joffre, but in his case it had been a compensation as much as a guerdon. Foch would not have welcomed "a wreath upon a grave", but for him the baton was the symbol of his office.

His immediate goal was modest. After consultation with the Commanders-in-Chief, he had decided, first, to free the Amiens-Paris railway, next complete the freeing of the main eastern line by biting off the Saint-Mihiel salient, and then drive the enemy back from the region of the northern coalfields. He hoped, however, that by the end of the summer there would be opportunity for an offensive on a grander scale.

Everyone has heard of "Ludendorff's black day",

the 8th August, 1918, but only those who witnessed its events can realize how hearts leapt up as the armies of Rawlinson and Débeney, linked under the command of Haig, crashed into the enemy's defences. At certain points the Canadian Corps on the British right covered six miles by nightfall, a distance nowhere approached by the Germans in the first day of their Somme offensive, though exceeded owing to special circumstances on the Aisne. The Allies could do it as well as they.

Humbert struck in from the south side of the salient in the direction of Lassigny—a little too late, as it proved; for the Germans had anticipated the thrust and pulled out their artillery.

By the 11th, however, resistance stiffened, and when the enemy reached the old battle-line in front of Roye it became very strong. There followed a sharp clash between Foch and Haig. Foch ordered a renewed attack to be carried out on the 16th. Haig, on the 14th, sent a message that in view of the strength of the enemy's defences he must defer the operation and combine it with an offensive north of the Somme. Foch repeated his injunctions. Next morning the two met at Sarcus, and there were some high words. Haig's scheme was to break off the attack, cancel the project of freeing the Artois coalfields—which could be effected indirectly—and launch his Third Army in the direction of Bapaume. He would thus turn not only the present German position in front of the Fourth Army but also the line of the Somme. Finding that Débeney also was nervous as to the enemy's strength at Roye, Foch gave way. Moreover, in order to free for the venture the Canadian Corps, which had not been involved in the German offensives and was now perhaps the finest in the world, he relieved it by French troops. The importance of the incident has

been exaggerated, but of the two courses of action Haig's was to be preferred.

Byng's army fulfilled the expectations of his chief. Attacking on 21st August, it reached Bapaume on the 25th. Simultaneously Rawlinson made ground immediately north of the Somme and Mangin, south of the Oise, fought his way across the difficult plateaux north of Soissons. Then, on the 26th, Horne's First Army attacked east of Arras, and in two days came up against the famous defences known to us as the Drocourt-Quéant Line and to the Germans as the Wotan-Stellung. The pressure on both flanks had the result foretold by Haig. Between the 27th and 29th the enemy abandoned the Roye line, on which he had resisted so strongly, and fell back, in places as much as nine miles. Still no respite was afforded to him. The British right continued to advance; the First Army broke into the Wotan-Stellung on 2nd September; and a further great series of withdrawals brought the enemy back by the 8th to the Aisne near Vailly, to Saint-Simon, Roisel and Gouzeaucourt. Up in Flanders he was gradually abandoning most of his gains of the Lys offensive.

The freeing of the main eastern railway by the elimination of the Saint-Mihiel salient was to be the next move. It had, however, meanwhile become evident that such an aim was too modest. There was more to be effected than the freeing of a railway, however important.

This affair of Saint-Mihiel involved the Allied Commander-in-Chief in one of the most difficult of his many international problems. Pershing had long demanded that the Americans should fight as a national army; now he insisted. The Americans must henceforth be engaged under their own command. Then Haig put forward a new suggestion: that the main body of the

American forces should be directed against Mézières, while his own chief effort should be in the direction of Cambrai.

Haig was, in fact, returning to the French strategy of 1915.¹ If by a swift advance he could capture or even bring under effective artillery fire the vital rail and road centres in the Douai plan, he would disintegrate the German front. Simultaneously, in addition to the offensive in Flanders which he knew Foch had in mind, he proposed a thrust against the railway south of the Ardennes, about Mézières. A continuation of the Saint-Mihiel offensive would threaten this railway equally, and even more speedily, but would not fulfil Haig's design. The railway south of the Ardennes could not of itself bear the whole weight of maintaining, still less of withdrawing, the German left wing. If Mézières were not attacked, the enemy would be able to use at his leisure the lines north and west of it connecting with the main system through Liège for the purpose of retirement; if heavy pressure were exerted in the direction of Mézières, he would, on the other hand, be jammed up against the Ardennes and eventually rendered unable either to continue fighting or to retreat.

Foch sprang to the opportunity. He went so far as to tell Pershing that if it were impossible to carry out the Saint-Mihiel offensive with limited objectives first, he would abandon it. Pershing, eager to encourage his troops with the comparatively easy undertaking at Saint-Mihiel, replied that he would carry it out and attack west of the Meuse a fortnight later. But he must command an integral American army, and would accept no tutelage in the form of a French Chief of the Staff. Foch agreed. He was somewhat nervous as to

¹ See p. 87.

how the Americans, with their unwieldy, double-strength divisions, considerable transport, and inexperienced staffs, would fare, but he realized the drive of these fresh troops. Never did he show himself more open-minded.

The Americans attacked the flanks of the Saint-Mihiel salient on 12th September. The Germans had received some warning and had begun to evacuate the bulge, but too late. They were completely overrun, and lost 460 guns, a fine American success on which Foch congratulated Pershing without stint.

It has been suggested that the push might well have been continued instead of the American effort being switched west of the Meuse. The best answer to this is that already given, namely, that such an operation would not have fulfilled its purpose. In any case, the Army Commander, Hunter Liggett, a sound judge, did not believe the Americans were at this stage capable of it.

On 18th September Rawlinson's Fourth Army forced its way to within assaulting distance of the Hindenburg Line north of Saint-Quentin, taking 10,000 prisoners in the process. All was now ready for a general offensive. The ideas of Foch had expanded. He realized that the shock of defeat added to the grinding of the Somme and Ypres were telling. "It's not the old Jerry," said the British soldier, who would never think of the old Jerry without respect. The pressure of the blockade had become very severe. The huge booty of their offensives had been invaluable to the Germans, but when it was consumed the memory was disheartening. The soldier who cut steaks from dead horses, who drank *Ersatz* coffee, and had his wounds bound with paper bandages, was depressed by the knowledge that the Allies had in abundance what he lacked. The most important factor,

however, was two months of unbroken Allied success. Now, Foch would see to it, there would be no easing of the strain but rather a threefold increase.

The marshal's countenance was unchanged, but it was noted that his cap, always hitherto set straight, was now worn on one side, and that his cane was often carried "at the slope" over his shoulder.

CHAPTER XVII

VICTORY

ON 3rd September Foch issued to the Commanders-in-Chief the directive which determined the future course of the war:

The British, supported by the French left, would attack in the general direction of Cambrai and Saint-Quentin;

The French centre would drive the enemy beyond the Aisne;

The Americans, after completing the Saint-Mihiel operation, would launch an attack in the direction of Mézières, supported on their left by the French Fourth Army.

Then, on the 8th, Foch went to see the King of the Belgians at La Panne, afterwards conferring with Haig and Plumer at Cassel. As a result, an Anglo-Belgian operation to capture first the Passchendaele ridge and then press forward on Ghent and Bruges was arranged. For this purpose the British Second Army and French troops to be sent up later were placed under the command of King Albert, with Degoutte as Chief of the Staff. The dates were to be the 26th for the Franco-American attack west of the Meuse, the 27th for that of the British Third and First Armies on Cambrai, the 28th for that of the Flanders Group, and the 29th for that of Rawlinson's Fourth Army supported by Débeney's First, north of Saint-Quentin. This timing of the offensives was preferable to striking simultaneously, as it was

calculated to produce a certain confusion and doubt in the mind of the enemy's command.

The Franco-American attack on the right started well, but soon met with skilled and stubborn opposition. Pershing threw in troops till his zone between the Meuse and the Argonne became overcrowded and there was considerable confusion. But it was certain that in any case the enemy would resist the Americans yard by yard. Their progress, with that of Gouraud and further pressure on either side of Reims, and still more the threat of Haig's advance in the centre, brought about a hurried German retreat to the Suippes.

The blow struck by Haig on 27th September was one of the most decisive of the war. The Third and First Armies of Byng and Horne assaulted in the direction of Cambrai. The great barrier of the Canal du Nord was passed on a narrow front, after which the attackers debouched fanwise to pursue their victorious progress. Breaking through the Hindenburg position, they were at the gates of Cambrai by the following night.

Meanwhile Rawlinson's Fourth Army had been deluging with shell the Hindenburg Line north of Saint-Quentin. On the 29th it too attacked, passed the Saint-Quentin Canal, and opened a breach in the Hindenburg system, which was enlarged until the whole army stood in open country. Débeney passed the canal—which bends back sharply behind Saint-Quentin—on 3rd October. On the 8th the British Fourth and Third Armies pierced the next defensive system, the Hunding-Stellung. Another German withdrawal, between the Oise and the Sensée, followed.

German reserves had been drawn towards the main battlefield, and the Flanders front was thinly held. Indeed, in the north, weather and the effects of years of

artillery fire upon low-lying waterlogged ground proved more difficult obstacles than the German resistance. The attack began on 28th September as arranged, and on the 29th the Messines and Passchendaele ridges were captured by the Anglo-Belgians. That morning Foch visited Plumer and King Albert and urged them to press on rapidly against Roulers and Thourout. But progress on this shell-pocked and tortured ground soon slowed down. It was impossible to maintain the ammunition supply until communications had been established, and a halt had to be called for this purpose.

Foch was fond of the simile of the "inclined plane" applied to the conditions of a victorious advance. But, it hardly needs to be said at this stage, he believed in hastening the course of the "moving object" sliding down the plane. "Tout le monde à la bataille!" was now his slogan. There was no time now to think of fatigue and strain, still less of battalions reduced to skeletons of their establishment. ("Conquering armies have always been in rags," and, "Victories are won by the survivors," he replied when reminded of these facts.) He knew that the German battalions were weaker still. When the British Mission brought Weygand returns showing the shortage of man-power, he answered that the marshal got similar reports nearly every day from Pétain: he scarcely had time to look at them, because he believed that the end was now coming and that the greatest economy in man-power would be complete victory.

Good news came from Franchet d'Espérey. In the last fortnight of September the Bulgarians had been completely overthrown, and, as stalwart "Easterners" have proclaimed, a back door was opened through which to reach the Central Powers. It was a back door

approached by a very long and stony back avenue, yet it was all to the good. Nevertheless, it was not the overthrow of Bulgaria which caused Germany's appeal for the opening of peace negotiations, delivered in Washington on 6th October.

Three convergent advances were in progress, wrote Foch on the 10th: that in Belgium, that of the centre in the general direction of Maubeuge, and that of the Aisne and Meuse on the right. The centre he considered the most important. Continuing its drive eastward, it was to fan out northward in order to free the Lille area in conjunction with the Flanders group, and southward in order to clear the line of the Serre, which Mangin was now approaching from the neighbourhood of Laon.

On the 15th the Franco-American armies of the right reached the Hunding-Stellung, the Americans and Gouraud after hard slogging, the French on their left by a rapid advance on the heels of the retreating enemy followed by hastily mounted but successful attacks between Aisne and Oise. North of the Oise Débeney, Rawlinson and Byng, forcing their way forward between Saint-Quentin and Cambrai and then hastening on the enemy's heels, reached Le Cateau. But the northern offensive, if less difficult, was even more spectacular. Communications in Flanders had been roughly re-established, and the French Sixth Army under General de Boissoudy—replacing Degoutte so that the latter could devote himself wholly to his functions as Chief of the Staff to King Albert—had been brought into the Belgian line. On the first day Moorseele, Roulers and Cortemarck were captured; on the second, the Belgians reached Thourout. The biggest German

retirement yet experienced followed immediately. Between the centre and left offensives the enemy hastily evacuated Denain and Lille, then Roubaix and Tourcoing. More significant still, he abandoned the entire Belgian coast. On 20th October the Belgian left rested on the Dutch frontier, and King Albert entered Bruges amidst wild jubilation.

Foch had hardly a care now except as regards the American attacks on the right. There, indeed, he had expected greater results. He recognized, however, that the Americans were undergoing an inevitable apprenticeship, that the ground over which they were fighting favoured defence, and that the troops were striving magnificently, sacrificing themselves without stint. Clemenceau, on the other hand, was conscious only that the advance was painfully slow. He had been boiling up for several days when on 21st October he demanded of Foch nothing less than that an appeal should be made to President Wilson for the removal of Pershing. It was madness at this stage. The war was as good as over, and in any case, if Wilson had refused, the effect would have been deplorable. With a blend of reason and flat defiance, Foch averted the peril. Clemenceau was the greatest civilian the war produced, as Foch was the greatest soldier; but there were moments which explain the remark of Poincaré when summoning Clemenceau to power, that he dreaded "the terrible recklessness of the Tiger".

Yet not often has a commander had a better backer. And though sparks flew when their two steels touched, they fully appreciated each other while the war lasted. It is from about this period that we have one pleasant story. Clemenceau called to see Foch. The marshal was at Mass, he was told; but someone would fetch him.

"No, no," answered the old freethinker, "leave him alone. All this is paying him very well, so far."

The Americans had learnt their lesson. Their next drive, beginning on 1st November, was brilliantly successful, as were those of the centre on Maubeuge and of the left in Flanders. By the 9th the enemy was in rapid retreat from Attigny to Ghent. In Italy the Austrians had collapsed and agreed to an armistice on the 4th. One new offensive had been mounted, to be carried out by the armies of Mangin and Gérard under the orders of Castelnau east of the Moselle—the very ground over which Foch had led his XX. Corps in August, 1914—on 14th November. It was never launched, and it was not needed. By 11th November the vital junctions of Mézières and Aulnoye were in Allied hands. So far as their communications went, the hostile forces were virtually severed in twain. They could no longer continue to fight on the retreat.

All through October Foch had been working out the terms of an armistice. He appealed to Clemenceau to put him in touch with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs so that he could frame them in accordance with France's future policy, but this far-sighted request was refused. Now that victory was assured, Clemenceau was beginning to experience that nervousness which France has always felt about famous and popular soldiers since the days of Napoleon. The fear was groundless when the soldier was Foch. On one point the latter was determined: he would have the Rhine. This was an essential military precaution in the first place; in the second, if France decided to hold the Rhine, it must be seized now. There were certain minor difficulties. Haig thought the terms too hard, not from the point of view of humanity, but because he doubted their acceptance—though the

British Admiralty made them harder by insisting on the internment of Germany's Navy. Pétain thought them too easy. However, all was prepared when the moment came.

Foch has been reproached for foregoing his offensive in Lorraine, but most unjustly. He gave the Allies complete control, power to do what they liked. If Germany were prepared to yield this, who was he to send to their deaths tens of thousands of men to add to the holocaust of the last four and a quarter years? And if the Germans, as was quite probable, hoisted white flags all along their front, was he to butcher them? That the German armies were not utterly routed may have been a misfortune because it allowed fanatics to cozen the nation into the belief that it was not defeated; but not a misfortune to avoid which it was worth while to spill more blood. "I do not make war for the sake of making war," Foch told the American, Colonel House.

In the small hours of 7th November Foch received a wireless message from the German Supreme Command giving the names of their plenipotentiaries. The German Government, it was added, would be happy if "in the interests of humanity" the arrival of the delegation could be made the signal for a provisional suspension of arms. Foch did not answer this naive request, but gave the place and time at which the German representatives should present themselves. It was on the front of Débeney's army. Then, with Weygand and Admiral Sir Rosslyn Wemyss, First Lord of the Admiralty, at the head of a British naval delegation, he left Senlis, his latest headquarters, by train for Rethondes in the Forest of Compiègne. The train, comfortably fitted, with a dining-car converted into a quite roomy office, was run on to a gun-spur.

Owing to the hopeless confusion behind the German front the delegates were very late, and when their train arrived at 7 a.m. on the 8th, they were tired out. Two hours later they were ushered into the presence of Foch. ("When I saw them in front of me, I said to myself: 'There is the German Empire. . . . We will be polite, but we must show them who we are.'")

He was, however, economical of politeness. He called for their credentials and examined them, then demanded what they wanted. Their leader, Herr Erzberger, asked what were his proposals. He had none. Did they want an armistice? "Yes." "Good, we will read you the conditions drawn up by the Allied Governments."

The terms startled Erzberger. The delegation fenced, talked of Bolshevism and indiscipline, suggested that they might cross the lines. That, said Foch, was the malady of beaten armies and nations worn out by battle. They tried to prolong the time-limit for acceptance of the terms. He refused, but offered his services in sending a messenger to communicate with their Government. He made slight concessions: a little extra time for the evacuation of invaded territory, a small reduction in the number of machine-guns to be surrendered. Time dragged on. All the while the Allied Armies were in pursuit of the retreating enemy. They were in difficulties now with their communications, but prepared to continue the advance with mobile columns. The 10th November was feverish. Would the Germans sign? Hours went by, but at 2 a.m. on the 11th Erzberger announced that they were ready. The text was read, and after further discussion signatures were affixed at 5 a.m.

It does not come within our province to consider the terms in detail. The essentials were as follows:

Cessation of hostilities at 11 a.m. that day.

Evacuation of invaded territory and of Alsace-Lorraine.

Repatriation of citizens of Allied nations.

Surrender of vast stocks of war material (including 5000 guns and 25,000 machine-guns).

Evacuation of the left bank of the Rhine and bridge-heads beyond it, to be held by the Allies.

Repatriation of Allied prisoners of war, without immediate reciprocity.

Surrender of all submarines.

Internment of surface vessels as designated by the Allies.

Weygand took over while Foch lay down for an hour—he had lately, it may be recalled, reached his sixty-seventh birthday. Then he drove to Paris with the terms. Symbolically, the sun burst through the morning fog as he sped on his way. He handed the document to Clemenceau, with the remark: “My work is finished; yours is beginning.” He called on Poincaré. Then he drove to the Avenue de Saxe. A market was held in this street on Mondays, and the crowd, seeing his car outside his door, began to demonstrate. He therefore left, but was recognized again in the Place de l’Opéra, and ran some risk of being pulled out of the car. Finally, he gave his admirers the slip. By that time the eleventh hour was long past, the hour at which silence fell upon the battlefield.

CHAPTER XVIII

PEACE

ON 12th November Foch issued his last and most famous Order of the Day to the armies under his command. It may be given in the original lest some of its noble simplicity escape in translation.

“ Officiers, sous-officiers, soldats des armées alliées.

“ Après avoir résolument arrêté l'ennemi, vous l'avez pendant des mois, avec une foi et une énergie inlassables, attaqué sans répit.

“ Vous avez gagné la plus grande bataille de l'Histoire et sauvé la cause la plus sacrée: la liberté du monde.

“ Soyez fiers!

“ D'une gloire immortelle vous avez paré vos drapeaux.

“ La postérité vous garde sa reconnaissance.

“ Le maréchal de France,

“ Commandant en chef les armées alliées:

“ F. FOCH.”

He had already addressed to the Commanders-in-Chief instructions for the occupation of the territory, including Alsace-Lorraine, to be evacuated by the Germans. On the 25th he himself made his entry into Metz. This was one of the most moving days of his life. He had seen the well-loved Lorraine capital but once since 1871, and that on a hasty, secret visit which might have brought trouble upon him. How different



L. N. A.

MARSHAL FOCH IN THE PEACE MARCH

were the circumstances now as he rode, hailed as a deliverer, up to the statue of Fabert! Next day it was Strasbourg, a Strasbourg so mad with joy that the very buildings seemed to rock with the acclamations of its citizens. Here there was the statue of a greater than Fabert. Foch saluted Kléber with the very sabre which had been carried by the young Bonaparte.

By 30th November Alsace-Lorraine and Luxemburg, as well as all invaded France and Belgium, were occupied by the Allies. On 9th December their troops reached the German Rhine, and by the 17th forty Allied divisions were disposed in the Palatinate, the Rhineland west of the river, and the great semicircular bridgeheads to the east.

Meanwhile, Foch had been busy and constantly on the move. One of his first acts had been to approve heartily and even with delight the bestowal of the baton of a Marshal of France upon the man who had done so much in the achievement of the victory, General Pétain.¹ A meeting of the Supreme War Council took place in London on 1st December, and it was only after much long-distance telephoning that he was found in time for preliminary discussion with the Government. He was actually visiting Luxemburg at the moment. He arrived in London on 30th November with Clemenceau, receiving a tumultuous welcome. Veteran foreign observers declared that never in their experience had London been so mad with joy. He spoke in glowing terms of Haig and the British Army, which had, indeed, in the final offensives captured nearly half of the total of 360,000 prisoners and 6000 guns taken by the four Allied con-

¹ Clemenceau would never agree that the services of any other commander were comparable to those of Joffre and Foch, and while he remained President of the Council no others were raised to the rank of Marshal. Later on the names of Franchet d'Espérey, Lyautey, Fayolle, Gallieni, and Maunoury were added, the last two posthumously.

tingents. The following evening, at 10 Downing Street, he put forward for the first time his proposal for a Rhineland State, and discovered that Lloyd George did not approve of it.

On the very day of the Armistice Clemenceau had begun preparations for holding a peace conference. His desire for speed was, however, rendered unavailing, first, by the long delay in the arrival of the President of the United States, and then by the British Prime Minister's determination to hold a General Election while public enthusiasm was still hot. The delays, which had to be bridged by renewals of the Armistice, were most unfortunate, because they bred fresh complications and difficulties, while the armies grew restless and looked forward eagerly to demobilization.

Foch did not await the assembly of the delegates in order to press upon the French Government the idea which for over six months occupied his mind almost to the exclusion of all other considerations: the Rhine boundary, the frontier of 1814, for France. Germany, so ran his reasoning, with her growing population and the militarist spirit which would endure under no matter what régime, would constitute an unceasing menace to peace. "The only natural barrier between us is the Rhine. Whoever holds its bridges is master of the situation."

This is not the place to discuss the practicability of his purely military solution. It may be noted, however, that the project was not as illusory as may appear to those who view it only in the light of later history. There are still shrewd observers who believe that a Rhineland State and a French or Franco-Belgian Rhine boundary was not impossible if all the Allies had been agreed upon it and had acted at once.

Be that as it may, the French Government accepted

the view of Foch, but with a feeling that they were beaten before the battle began, because they had small hope that Great Britain and the United States would agree. Foch, who sensed this feeling, addressed a second memorandum on the subject to Clemenceau, which was communicated also to the Allied Governments, on 10th January, 1919.

The conference assembled at last on the 18th. Foch was not one of the delegates. He may not have expected to be chosen, but he had certainly hoped to plead his cause. He was given about an hour's notice on the telephone that it was not desirable for him to attend. He was deeply disappointed, feeling that he might have been able to back Clemenceau effectively. That is not so certain; the statesmen were not particularly anxious for military aid. The Treaty of Versailles, which is to-day so poor in reputation that every schoolboy spits upon its memory, was not made by soldiers. They might have made a harsher or less moral treaty, but they could scarce have made one less successful.

However, Foch did contrive to make his views known. He demanded the Rhine frontier with insistence. He put all his force and passion into his advocacy. If he can be pictured in this respect as the jack-booted tyrant, the portrait is belied by his views on minor matters. He suggested the fixing of a lump sum, one hundred milliards of marks, for indemnities, instead of leaving Germany under the threat of constantly renewed demands reaching astronomical figures. He urged that peace should be signed speedily so that the world might return to work and commerce might be resumed.

Another miserable delay was caused because Wilson had to return to the United States and did not arrive back in Paris till 14th March, now more than ever

determined to resist what he considered to be the extravagant demands of the French. Yet, though Wilson was supported by Lloyd George, Clemenceau gained not a little in the wordy battle. In particular, he obtained the Saar and its coalfields for a period of fifteen years to compensate France for the German destruction of the French mines, deliberately aimed at crippling her industrially. He also obtained a pledge that Britain and the United States would come to the aid of France if she were unjustifiably attacked.

It was not enough for Foch. He felt that he must stand by his principle: nothing would compensate for the Rhine. He became somewhat bitter about Great Britain, protesting that while she opposed French demands she herself was obtaining greater advantages. As for the proposed alliance, it had to be ratified, and supposing it were ratified, how long would it take even Britain to give effective aid?

He determined to make his voice heard and repeatedly demanded that he should be given an audience by the "Big Four" of the treaty, Wilson, Lloyd George, Clemenceau and Orlando. This was granted, and on the 31st March he read to them a memorandum. He concluded as follows:

"By renouncing the Rhine as a natural barrier we should be conniving at an inconceivable, a monstrous situation. Germany would be able to continue her enterprises as though she had been victorious—the very Germany that has sent millions of human beings to death, the very Germany that planned to annihilate our country and leave her a heap of ashes, the very Germany that plotted to dominate the world by brute force."

The case being prejudged, his words had little effect,

but that did not deter him from making another effort. He demanded to be summoned before the Cabinet, and was informed that he would be heard before anything was settled definitely. His anger rose to white heat when on 17th April he was ordered to invite the German delegates to Versailles. If they were to be invited, then everything was already settled, and the promise made to him had been broken. He refused to send the telegram, and it was despatched by the Minister of War himself. Clemenceau made arrangements for Pétain to succeed him, but did not venture to carry them out because such an action would have rocked his ministry to its foundations. At last Foch was given grudging permission to address the Cabinet and two delegates, Jules Cambon and Tardieu, who were not ministers. This meeting took place on 25th April, just before the arrival of the German delegation. Foch was to some extent fighting in the dark, because Clemenceau would not communicate to him the draft of the treaty, though the President of the Republic—well known to be on the side of Foch—insisted that it should be explained to him that the treaty did not include the Rhine frontier. Again he was defeated; again he refused to yield.

Finally, after appeals to Clemenceau, Wilson and Lloyd George, he was shown a copy of the draft, and with it in his hand made his last protest to a plenary session of the conference.

He was not at Versailles on 28th June, when the German delegates, under threat of a further invasion and of anarchy at home, signed unconditionally. ("That day I took refuge in my headquarters at Kreuznach.") As all the world knows, the United States refused to honour the President's cheque, and Great Britain refused to ratify the treaty of alliance without her.

His anxieties were to remain with Foch all his life, but he had philosophy to temper them. He did not become embittered. Yet in the two great "peace processions" of July in Paris and London, which should have been so gratifying to him, his air was sombre.

In January, 1920, he assumed a new task. The "Allied Military Committee of Versailles" was set up to supervise the execution of the military clauses of the peace treaties, to act as technical adviser to the Governments, and if necessary to initiate military measures. He was appointed to preside over this committee.

He installed himself in one of the annexes of the Invalides, beneath the shadow of the dome. It was within a short walk of his new home, the Hôtel de la Rue de Grenelle, formerly the official residence of the Chief of the General Staff, which had been assigned to him by the Government. Thereafter, unless he were travelling to one of the numerous functions which called for his presence, or on leave, he was in his office every day. Nearly all the great ones among the Allied peoples visited him there at one time or another, and many of the humble, all to be received with friendliness and courtesy. At first his day was sometimes a long one; but later on he was able to shorten his working hours to from 9.30 a.m. until 12.10 p.m. If he arrived a little later or left a little earlier, he was careful to give his reasons, with a touching note of semi-apology.

All the unrest and violence of the post-war world flowed over the telephone line to that austere and quiet room. The gravest hours were in July, 1920, when the Russian armies turned upon the Poles who were invading their territory, and swept them back in headlong retreat upon Warsaw. Bolshevism seemed to be pouring

into civilized Europe from the same steppes that bred the Tartar invaders of the Middle Ages.

The Poles appealed for help, and eyes were turned to Foch. The Government were averse to his risking his prestige, which was of immense value to them, in this tenebrous affair. He himself suggested that Weygand should go. ("He will do all that I should do. . . . If that is not enough there will still be time for me to go myself.") Weygand went, and the Russians, attacked in flank, fled back by the way they had come. The precise part played by the lieutenant of Foch need not here concern us. Some day, it is to be hoped, General Weygand will write his account of that visit in full. If it were as forcible as some of his verbal comments, it would be entertaining reading; but that is unlikely. He has inherited from his chief a sense of responsibility, and no writer of memoirs so burdened is likely to produce "sensations". It may, however, be noted that one shrewd and well-informed observer in Warsaw did not agree with the widely circulated story that the victory was wholly due to Polish leadership. Lord D'Abernon considered that the military success was, on the contrary, "due in a large measure" to the sober, methodical efforts of the French Mission under Weygand in organizing Polish resistance.

Nearer home arose the problem of the military measures to be taken if Germany refused to fulfil the reparation clauses of the Treaty of Versailles. Foch was now only an adviser, not a commander, but he bore a heavy responsibility. When there was wild talk of an advance to Berlin, he discouraged the project. When in 1923 the Reparations Commission reported that Germany had deliberately defaulted in her deliveries of coal, and it was decided to occupy and exploit the Ruhr coalfield,

he advised caution. He would, in accordance with his old principle, rather have advanced by bounds, assimilating each strip of territory before occupying the next. ("I was found too slow and timid. The Government wanted to swallow everything at one gulp. Consequently, we choked and could not digest it.") In the end a new scheme of reparations was drawn up by American business men.

The work of Foch diminished gradually. It may be said that it virtually came to an end in 1927; but he remained at his post and died in harness.



THE MANOR OF TROFEUNTEUNIO: REAR FAÇADE, 1938

CHAPTER XIX

THE END

OFFICE work apart, the marshal's post-war life was a full one. Like all his tough breed, he kept his health, with the aid of temperate habits and love of exercise. Not the most succulent dishes at a banquet tempted him to eat more than he needed; nothing made him forgo his walks.

He had acquired a humorously philosophical outlook upon ceremonies. ("I am a mere parcel. I let them pack me up. They exhibit me, then store me away again.") It was a comfort that he had not to think out all these inaugurations of war memorials and celebrations of anniversaries. Everything, to the last detail, was arranged for him. If they wanted him to drive, he drove. If they suggested that at such and such a point he should get out and walk, out he got meekly and walked. But when the *Marseillaise* blared out he was very much the Marshal of France; and when the speech came it was his own, and there was no formalism in it, whether it were extemporized and therefore abrupt, broken, arresting, and touching, or written the day before, and therefore, like nearly all his written work, over-polished and with over-long sentences. In either case it came from the heart.

These excursions sometimes gave him opportunity to raise his voice against the tendency of his country and ours to draw apart. Thus, in May, 1922, when he welcomed Haig at a French cemetery at Notre-Dame-

de-Lorette, King George V placed his hand over their clasped hands and said: "Always good friends, is it not so?" "Always friends, sire, for the same reasons and for the same cause," answered Foch. On 4th June, 1923, when relations had become even more strained, he unveiled a memorial to the fallen at Abbeville. Lord Cavan, then Chief of the Imperial General Staff, had come to represent the British Army. Foch took him by the arm and led him up to the monument, with the words: "Let us show our dead that we remain united."

Almost every honour in the power of the Allied nations to bestow came his way. He used to point out smilingly that he had over twenty "large decorations". He joked about them, but he did not pretend to despise them. Without question, he was proudest of all of the baton of a British Field-Marshal placed in his hand by King George in July, 1919. Four years later he was created a Marshal of Poland. The British Government had immediately after the Armistice, on 29th November, 1918, awarded to him an honorary appointment to the Order of Merit (Military), a rare distinction which only three other foreigners, the Japanese Field-M Marshals Yamagata and Oyama and Admiral Togo, had then received. In the following year the name of Marshal Joffre was added to the list.

On 5th February, 1920, Foch was received into the French Academy. That institution has on several occasions welcomed men who have rendered outstanding service to the country, even if they have no "literary baggage", and he would have received the honour had he never written a line. In fact, however, his literary pretensions were respectable. On that occasion he pronounced, with admirable appropriateness, a eulogy of a predecessor on the roll of Academicians two hundred

years before, like himself a Marshal of France, who had, like him, achieved a great victory when all seemed lost. Foch made no reference to the fact, which must have been present in every mind, that Villars at Rastadt had been the sole architect of the peace with the Empire, while he himself, after a far greater triumph than the victory of Denain, had had no part in the peace with the Empire's successors.

Like his other honours, he took the green coat of the "Immortals" seriously, but not so seriously that his new functions as one of the guardians of the French language were exempt from his droll reflections. Once a member of his Staff suggested that a phrase from his pen was not grammatical. This was too much; he would have no more lessons in grammar. "Je m'en f—; je suis de l'Académie."

He wrote his memoirs of the war, and when it is said that he wrote them, the words are to be taken literally, as they cannot always be of the reminiscences of generals in old age. Having completed the record of 1914, he wisely turned to 1918, recognizing that his time might be short. He was not able to fill the gap.

The memoirs have not been popular. They are extremely austere and even colourless. There is little personal interest in these pages. It is likewise the case, as has been pointed out, that there are some slips in them; yet few personal records can be subjected to a stronger historical light, and on the whole few bear it so well. Near the end of his days he turned aside to write a short study of Saint Joan, a subject dear to his heart.

He voyaged a great deal. In 1921 he went to the United States to attend the convention of the American Legion at Kansas City. For two months he travelled

about the country, thoroughly enjoying himself. He took to the Americans as they took to him. Their energy and constructive spirit delighted him. Of war he had written, "the essential thing is to have an object, a plan, and a method", and it seemed to him that the people of the United States had brought similar principles to bear upon the affairs of peace.

The following year it was Rumania, and the year after that Poland and Czechoslovakia. In Poland also he found vitality to admire. There was much to praise in Czechoslovakia, but he did not like her composition or boundaries. When the latter were being drawn, he remarked, he sometimes had goose-flesh and felt his hair stiffen on his head. ("A mosaic . . . a strange conglomeration. Where and what are her frontiers? They were certainly not determined by considerations of strategy.")

When he set out for Poland in 1923 he said farewell for a long period to Weygand. On 19th April of that year Foch, attending a meeting of the Academy, was called aside by Poincaré, who confided to him that Weygand was wanted for the post of High Commissioner in Syria, where affairs had become anarchical. Could the marshal spare him?

"I had not the right to clip his wings," said Foch afterwards. Yet the separation wrung his heart. It was not yet ten years since their association had begun, but it had been so close and had surmounted so many crises that their very souls seemed to have become interwoven. Weygand, who like Foch had married a wife from Brittany, had bought the Château of Coatamour at Ploujean, only a short walk from Trofeunteuniou. "You cannot get away from me now, whether you want to or not," Foch had said to him. Now he was escaping him.

Foch set out first, and Weygand saw him off at the Gare de l'Est. The crowd of notabilities stood back to allow the two, both obviously labouring under deep emotion, to talk together. At last Foch had to get into the carriage, but still stood at the window. "Be strong . . . alertness . . . variety of resources"—the phrases floated disjointedly to those in the background. The train began to move. One last phrase: "My *dear* Weygand!"

Some of his journeys were of that sad sort only too well-known to all old men who reach greatness, to pay the last respects to their great contemporaries. Actually, the first of these fell not in the fullness of years but by foul murder, when Henry Wilson was shot down at his own door in the summer of 1922. Early in 1926 it was Cardinal Mercier, the saintly Belgian prelate who had opposed German tyranny in his country during the war. Last of all, in January, 1928, it was Haig, for whom Foch appears to have had a warmer regard than Haig had for him. To attend his funeral Foch, whose health was at last weakening, broke off a visit to the Riviera and travelled from Nice to London.

Life was not all made up of official duties. Brittany called again, and as the years passed he was able to spend more and more time there. The effects of the war had been what they were in the case of many country estates.

A new roof was wanted; the trees, when the stern eye of their proprietor was removed, had lost their discipline, and the pruning secateurs were often now in use. Many neighbours came to call, and distinguished persons spending holidays at the seaside found their way through his modestly handsome stone gateway in the woodlands. One visitor was General Pershing, to

talk over old battles and perhaps smile over old controversies.

The marshal's days at Trofeunteuniou were happy. The family used to gather round him: Colonel and Madame Fournier—he did not long survive his father-in-law—Madame Bécourt, and the seven grandchildren. One may add that, though no male heir survived to bear the name, it is not to die. By a process analogous to our deed poll it has been added to those of Bécourt and Fournier. Foch did not live to see his great-grandchildren, but Madame la Maréchale now has three. Jean Bécourt-Foch, a cavalry officer at present attached to the Air Force, has a son, and his married sister has two children.

On 7th July, 1928, Foch had an unusual experience. He was present at Cassel when that statue, of which mention was made in an earlier part of this record, was inaugurated. The ceremony in that setting could not fail to be impressive. The marshal was happy, and thoroughly appreciated the very rare honour of assisting at his own apotheosis. For his intimates, however, there was a touch of sadness. M. Recouly, an old friend, noticed that, whereas hitherto the years seemed to have dealt very kindly with him, now for the first time signs of fatigue were evident. By the following November, when the Marne memorial was inaugurated, he was obviously in failing health.

The end was, in fact, not far off. On 13th January, 1929, he had a bad heart attack. Complications followed, and he went through a desperate illness, fighting as he had fought of old, while the world watched the course of his gallant struggle. It almost seemed that he would win.

On 20th March he was distinctly better, and when his doctor called in the afternoon he was allowed to

get up. He had his chair pushed into the window, and there for nearly an hour he sat talking to his wife and daughters, very weak and thin, but lucid, happy, and almost gay. Sometimes he plucked aside the curtain to watch the flow of visitors in the courtyard.

There was talk of his returning to bed, but he said he would wait a little longer. In five minutes he asked if his bed were warmed, and was told it was.

"Eh bien! C'est ça, allons-y!"

Suddenly he threw back his head as if to look at the sky. It was the syncope which his doctors had feared, and with it came the most merciful of deaths.

On 25th March his body was borne to rest near those of Napoleon and Turenne beneath the dome of the Invalides.

His place upon the roll of the great captains may not be easy to determine, but that is true of all but two of them. The task he faced and the responsibility he bore were equal to those of any. He never pretended that he had followed the ideal course on every occasion or that, if he were to relive the past, he would not act differently in some instances. According to his sound theory, there is often more than one solution to a military problem; one may be more perfect than another, but the devotion of spirit and intellect to the second best produces greater results than a formal order to apply the best. In each successive crisis of the year 1918 Foch studied the situation without flinching, made his plan, and used all his energies to ensure that it was put into force. To rate his achievement at the lowest, it is as certain as any "if" in history can be that, without his intervention, the defeats of March and May would have led to tenfold worse, and possibly to irretrievable, disaster.

Yet, while will and intellect alone may carry the omnipotent commander to his victorious ends, he who has under his orders the armies of free allied peoples, proud of their own traditions and suspicious of foreign methods, needs a further equipment. Moral as well as intellectual integrity must be included in his composition. Ferdinand Foch could not have played his part had he not been an honest as well as a great man.

He leaves a memory not only of victory and deliverance but also of faith, of goodness of heart, and of honour untarnished.

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(The sayings of Foch, which are generally enclosed in brackets, are for the most part taken from the two delightful books of Commandant Bugnet and M. Raymond Recouly, *Foch Talks* and *Marshal Foch, his own Words on many Subjects*.)

INDEX

NOTE.—The officers' names in the index are given with the ranks by which allusion is most frequently made to them in the course of the narrative.

- Abbeville, Conference of, 134.
 Academy, French, Foch elected to, 178.
 Agadir, Crisis of, 19, 32.
 Aisne, Battle of, 1917, 118.
 — German offensive of, 1918, ix, 144.
 Albert, King of the Belgians, 78, 159, 161, 163.
 Allenby, General Sir E., 5, 77.
 Allied Military Committee.
 See Versailles.
 Alsace-Lorraine, recovery of, 168.
 Alvensleben, General, V, 29.
 American Army, 129, 151, 152.
 Amiens, defence of, 1918, 136, 137.
 Amiens-Montdidier, Battles of, 153.
 Anthoine, General, 149.
 Arboriculture, Foch's love of, 13, 181.
 Armistice with Germany, 164.
 Arras, Battle of, 1917, 118; 1918, 138.
 Artillery, French and German, 37.
 Artois, Battle of, Spring 1915, 93; Autumn 1915, 96.
 Asquith, H. H., 114.
 Aubers Ridge, Battle of, 93.
 Audibert, Captain, 62.
 "Backs to the Wall" order, 143.
 Balfourier, General, 51.
 Bapaume, Battle of, 1918, 155.
 Barthélemy, General, 137.
 Bauer, Lieut.-Colonel, vi.
 Bazaine, Marshal, 29.
 Bécourt, Captain, 13, 71.
 — Madame, 182.
 Bécourt-Foch, Jean, 182.
 Belgian Army, 74, 77; at the Yser, 77 *et seq.*, 146.
 Benedek, General, 27.
 Berthelot, General, 152.
 Bienvenue, Edouard, x.
 — Julie. *See* Foch, Madame.
 Bismarck, Prince, 12.
 Blockade of Germany, 157.
 Boissoudy, General de, 162.
 Bombon, Foch's H.Q., 139.
 Bourbaki, General, 26.
 "Break-through" in warfare, viii, 95, 98, 131.
 Briand, Aristide, 116.
 British Army, 53, 57, 59, 100, 169.
 — Mission to Foch's H.Q., 140, 161.
 Brugère, General, 122.
 Bülow, Colonel-General, V, 65.

- Byng, General Sir J., 131, 138, 155, 162.
- Cadorna, General, 117.
- Cambon, Jules, 173.
- Cambrai, Battle of, 1917, 126, 131; 1918, 160.
- Caporetto, Battle of, 123.
- Castelnau, General de, 8, 41, 46, 48, 50, 75, 96, 117, 146, 164.
- Cavan, General Lord, 178.
- Champagne offensive, 1915, 96.
- Champagne-Marne, Battle of, 1918, 150.
- Churchill, Winston (quoted), 16.
- Clausewitz, Karl, V, 31, 89.
- Clemenceau, Georges, 18, 121, 122, 126, 129, 133, 144, 152, 163, 164, 169, 172, 173.
- Colonial service, training for, 3.
- Compiègne, Conference of, 134.
- Conduite de la Guerre, De la*, 18, 27.
- Czechoslovakia, Foch's view of, 180.
- D'Abernon, Lord, 175.
- Débeney, General, 15, 137, 154, 159, 160.
- Degoutte, General, 149, 151, 159, 162.
- Denain, Battle of, 179.
- Desticker, Lieut.-Colonel, 17, 62, 116, 139.
- Devaux, Lieut.-Colonel, 51, 62.
- Deville, Colonel, 61, 64, 69.
- Doullens, Conference of, 134.
- Dreyfus Case, 36.
- Dubail, General, 45.
- Dubois, General, 40, 84.
- Du Cane, General Sir J., 140.
- Duchêne, General, 50, 77, 123, 125, 145, 149.
- Dupré, Captain, 8, 10.
- École de Guerre, 13, 17, 18, 21.
- Edmonds, Br.-General Sir J. E., x.
- Erzberger, Mathias, 165.
- Espérey, General Franchet d', 5, 67, 70, 116, 145, 149, 161, 169.
- Failly, General de, 25.
- Falkenhayn, General, V, 100, 114.
- Fayolle, General, 9, 15; and the Battle of the Somme, 101 *et seq.*, 125, 133, 148, 151.
- Festubert, Battle of, 94.
- Field-Marshal, British, Foch created, 178.
- Flanders offensive, 1918, 159, 162.
- Foch, Bertrand-Napoléon, 8, 9.
- derivation of name, 7.
- Dominique, 8.
- Germain, 51, 71.
- Madame, x, 12, 123, 137, 182.
- Fontainebleau, Artillery School of, 12.
- Fournier, Colonel, 13, 110, 182.
- Franco-Prussian War, 10.
- Frederick, Crown Prince of Germany (1870), 25.
- Frederick-Charles, Prince, 29.
- French Army in 1914, 36.
- plans, 1915, 87.
- French, Field-Marshal Sir J., 74, 77, 81, 89, 92.
- Frontiers, Battles of the, 53.
- Galliéni, General, 5, 57, 169.
- Gallipoli Campaign, 88.
- Garibaldi, General, 26.
- Gas Attack. *See* Ypres, 1915.
- George V, King, 84, 178.
- Georges, Lieut.-Colonel, 139.
- German Army, 4, 36.
- Navy, interment of, 165.
- Geyer, Captain, vi.
- Goltz, Field-Marshal v. der, 25.
- Gonsalvo of Cordova, 24.

- Gough, General Sir H., 107, 112, 131, 137.
 Gouraud, General, 1, 4, 150, 160, 162.
 Grand Couronné of Nancy, 34.
 Grandmaison, General de, 14, 38.
 Grant, Lieut.-General Sir C., x, 139.
 Grasset, Colonel, 152.
 Grossetti, General, 61, 64, 80.
 Guillaumat, General, 149.
- Haig, Field-Marshal Sir D., vii, 81; and Battle of the Somme, 100 *et seq.*, 122, 126, 128, 134, 141, 142, 147, 150, 154, 155, 169, 164, 169, 177, 181.
 Hausen, General, V, 65.
 Henrys, General, 1.
 Hentsch, Major, 59.
 Hindenburg, Field-Marshal, V, 4, 114.
 — Line, 113.
 Horne, General Sir H., 155.
 House, Colonel, 165.
 Humbert, General, 55, 137, 154.
 Hume, David (quoted), 3.
- “Inclined Plane”, 161.
 Invalides, Foch’s tomb in, 183.
 Italian Theatre of War, 117, 123, 164.
- Jette, Commandant, 64.
 Joan of Arc, Saint, Foch’s study of, 179.
 Joffre, General, 8, 11, 20, 34, 36, 45, 47, 50, 53, 56, 59, 75, 88, 94, 95; and the Battle of the Somme, 100 *et seq.*, 115, 120, 129, 153, 178.
 Jomini, General, 21, 24.
- Kemmel Hill, loss of, 143.
 Kettler, General, V, 26.
- Kitchener, Field-Marshal Lord, 1, 100.
 Kléber, General, 169.
 Kluck, General, V, 57, 58.
 Kuhl, General, V, vi.
- Langle de Cary, General de, 54, 56, 67, 96.
 Lawrence, Lieut.-General Sir H., 135.
 Liggett, General Hunter, 157.
 Lloyd George, D., 114, 125, 139, 149, 170, 172.
 Loos, Battle of, 96.
 Lorraine, campaign in, 1914, 46.
 Lossberg, Colonel, V, vi.
 Loucheur, Louis, 133.
 Ludendorff, General, vi, vii, viii, ix, 4, 88, 114, 123, 131, 137, 141, 143, 144, 146, 152, 153.
 Lyautey, Marshal, 1, 5, 169.
 Lys, Battle of the, 141.
- Macedonian Campaign, 97, 120, 161.
 MacMahon, Marshal, 25.
 Maistre, General, 15.
 Malmaison, Battle of, 122.
 Mangin, General, 1, 4, 5, 148, 151, 155, 164.
 Manteuffel, General, V, 11, 26, 33.
 “March Offensive”. See Somme, 1918.
 Marlborough, Duke of, 23.
 Marne, Battle of the, 1914, 31, 59; 1918, 151.
 Marshal of France, Foch created, 153.
 Mars-la-Tour, Battle of, 28.
 Matz, Battle of the, 148.
 Maud’huy, General de, 15, 77.
 Maunoury, General, 169.
Memoires of Foch, 179.
 Mercier, Cardinal, 181.
 Meuse-Argonne, Battle of the, 160, 163.

- Micheler, General A., 106, 108, 112.
 Miles, Captain W., x.
 Millet, General, 13, 18.
 Milner, Viscount, 133, 147.
 Miribel, General de, 14.
 Mitry, General de, 152.
 Moltke, Colonel-General H., V, 41.
 — Field-Marshal, V, viii, 23, 27, 30.
 Mondement Château, 68, 69.
 Montgomery, Major-General A. A., 135.
 Mordacq, General, 121, 126.
 Morhange, Battle of, 49.
 Mortagne, Battle of the, 51.
 Nachod, Battle of, 22, 27, 39.
 Napoleon I, viii, 23, 24, 28, 30.
 — III, 10.
 Naulin, Commandant, 62, 63.
 Neuve Chapelle, Battle of, 89.
 Nicholas II, Emperor of Russia, 19.
 Nivelle, General, 9, 112, 114, 116, 119, 120, 122.
 Offensive, doctrine of the, 23, 38.
 Order of Merit, bestowed on Foch, 178.
 Orlando, Signor, 124, 172.
 Painlevé, Paul, 120, 122.
 Pau, General, 45.
 Peace Conference, 170.
 Pellé, General, 115.
 Pershing, General, 129, 144, 155, 156, 160, 163, 181.
 Pétain, General, 15, 96, 119, 120, 122, 127, 133, 137, 138, 141, 142, 144, 145, 149, 161, 165, 169, 173.
 Piave, Battle of the, 149.
 Pipe, Foch and his, 140.
 Plan XVII (1914), 40.
 Plumer, General Sir H., 125, 161.
 Poincaré, Raymond, 126, 135, 163, 167, 173, 180.
 Poland, Foch visits, 180.
 Polignan, Little Seminary of, 9.
 Polish-Russian War, 1920, 174.
 Polytechnique, École, 9, 11.
Principes de la Guerre, Des, 18.
 Principles of War, Foch's, 22.
 Race to the Sea (1914), 75.
 Rapallo, Conference of, 124.
 Rawlinson, General Sir H., and the Battle of the Somme, 106, *et seq.*, 135, 138, 154, 155, 157, 159, 160, 162.
 Recouly, Raymond, 182.
 Requin, Commandant, 62.
 Reserves, Foch's handling of, vii, 82, 141, 144, 146, 147, 150.
 Rethondes, Armistice signed at, 165.
 Rhine frontier, question of, 164, 170, 172, 173.
 Robertson, General Sir W., 121, 122, 124, 125.
 Rodez, lycée of, 9.
 Ronarc'h, Vice-Admiral, 78.
 Ruhr, occupation of, 175.
 Rumania, Foch visits, 180.
 Rupprecht, Crown Prince of Bavaria, 49, 146, 150, 152.
 Russian theatre of war, 41, 45, 122.
 Saint-Clément, college at Metz, 10.
 Saint-Gond, Marshes of, 59.
 Saint-Michel, college at Saint-Etienne, 9.
 Saint-Mihiel, Battle of, 155, 157.
 Sarcus, Foch's H.Q., 139; conference at, 154.
 Sarrail, General, 71.
 Saumur, Cavalry School of, 12.
 Saussier, Father, 10.
 Saxe, Maurice de, 24.

- Schlieffen, Field-Marshal Graf, viii, 41.
 September Offensive, 1918, 159.
 Sherman, General, 24.
 Somme, Battle of the, 1916, 101.
 — German offensive of, 1918, ix, 131.
 Sport, Foch's love of, 8.
 Sprecher v. Bernegg, Colonel, 117.
 Steinmetz, General, 27.
 Supreme War Council, 125, 127, 128, 130, 149, 169.
 Swiss neutrality, 1917, 116.
 Tarbes, lycée of, 9.
 Tardieu, André, 55, 62, 173.
 Trench warfare, beginning of, 86.
 Trofeunteuniou, Manor of, ix, 12, 123, 181.
 Turenne, Marshal-General, 23.
 United States, Foch visits, 179.
 Urbal, General d', 82, 92, 93.
 Verdun, Battle of, Spring 1916, 100; October 1916, 114; August 1917, 122.
 Verdy du Vernois, General, 22.
 Versailles, Treaty of, 171, 173; Allied Military Committee of, 174.
 Victor-Emmanuel, King of Italy, 174.
 Villars, Marshal-General, 179.
 Villers-Bretonneux, Action of, 143.
 Watteville, Lieut.-Colonel H. G. de, x.
 Wemyss, Admiral Sir R., 165.
 Weygand, General, vi, viii, x, 19, 23, 51, 62, 70, 78, 115, 117, 125, 134, 142, 161, 165, 175, 180.
 Wilhelm, Crown Prince of Germany, 150.
 Wilson, General Sir Henry, 19, 133, 134, 143, 181.
 — President, 163, 170, 171.
 Woerth, Battle of, 25.
 Ypres, Battle of, 1914, 81; 1915, 91; 1917, 122.
 Yser, Battle of the, 79.
 Yule, Lieut.-Colonel J. S., x.

FRENCH FORMATIONS AND UNITS

- Groupe d'Armées de l'Est, 117.
 Groupe d'Armées du Nord, 89.
 Groupement Foch, 117.
 First Army, 45, 137.
 Second Army, 44, 48, 50, 74, 96.
 Third Army, 137.
 Fourth Army, 53, 56, 96.
 Fifth Army, 53, 56, 62, 67.
 Sixth Army, 57, 58, 74; on the Somme, 101 *et seq.*
 Eighth Army, 89.
 Ninth Army, 57; at the Marne, 59 *et seq.*
 Tenth Army, 74, 77, 93, 100, 106, 108.
 Alsace, Army of, 45.
 V. Army Corps (1905), 18; (1870), 25.
 VIII. Army Corps (1912), 32.
 IX. Army Corps, 44, 50, 54, 56; at the Marne, 59 *et seq.*; at Ypres, 1914, 82; at Arras, 97.
 X. Corps, at the Marne, 61 *et seq.*
 XI. Army Corps, 54, 56; at the Marne, 59 *et seq.*

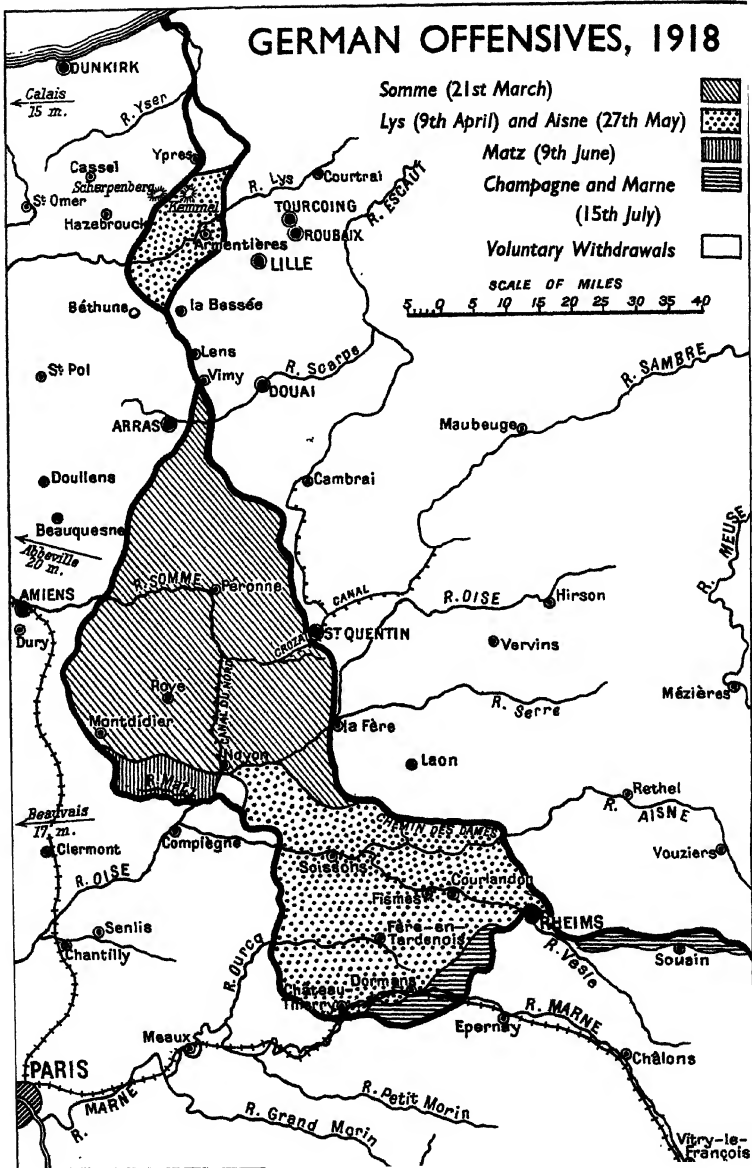
- XV. Army Corps, 44, 46, 48, 49, 50.
 XVI. Army Corps, 14, 45, 46, 48.
 XX. Army Corps, 32, 44, 46, 48, 49, 82, 105, 106.
 XXI. Army Corps, 67, 72.
 11th Division, 34, 49, 50.
 14th Division (1911), 20.
 17th Division, 55; at the Marne, 64 *et seq.*
 18th Division, 57, 60; at the Marne, 65 *et seq.*
 39th Division, 34, 49, 51.
 42nd Division, 55, 60; at the Marne, 61 *et seq.*; at the Yser, 79.
 Moroccan Division, 55; at the Marne, 61 *et seq.*
 52nd Reserve Division, 66.
 60th Reserve Division, 62.
 Marine Brigade, 77.
 9th Cavalry Division, 59.
 4th Infantry Regt. (1870), 10.
 65th Infantry Regt., 63.
 151st Infantry Regt., 61.
 10th Artillery Regt. (1878), 12.
 24th Artillery Regt. (1874), 12.
 29th Artillery Regt. (1900), 17.
 35th Artillery Regt. (1903), 17.

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